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A SCARLET SIN.

A NOVEL.

BY

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A SCARLET SIN.

CHAPTER I.

THE MISTRESS OF GLEBE ROYAL.

ear 1890, by
Agriculture

GLEBE ROYAL never looked more beautiful than it did in autumn, when the varied hues of dying nature were on its glorious old trees, turning their mantling leaves from every shade of green to yellow and crimson and copper brown; when the carpet of bracken that lay under them was rust color, and crackled as the deer sprang over it; and when the smooth-shaven lawn in front of the house was studded with dahlias, like living gems—for Glebe Royal had always been celebrated for its dahlias, and Sir Alan Chichester took a pride in keeping up everything as it had ever been. But on the autumn afternoon that sees this story open, the day's glory had departed, and left a misty veil like a pale grey cloud over the landscape. It had been raining heavily, and though the shower had abated, the raindrops still hung upon the "invisible" fence that divided the gardens from the park, and dripped silently from the overhanging eaves. The deer were huddled together in their sheds, the dahlias hung their heavy laden blossoms downwards, and the adjacent stables and

kennels seemed strangely quiet, for it was a hunting day, and Sir Alan Chichester, M.P. for the county, had been away since nine o'clock in the morning, with all his retinue. Not a sound was to be heard, except the crunching of the gravel drive under the clumsily shod feet and heavy tread of the baronet's sister, Miss Chichester, as she tramped up and down like a soldier on duty. Miss Chichester was a woman about fifty, full ten years older than her brother, Sir Alan, and of what most people mistook for a hard and uncompromising nature. Glebe Royal had been her home (as it had been that of her brother) all her life long, and her visits to other places had been few and far between. Her circle of acquaintance was therefore necessarily small, and her mind had had no opportunities of development. Her ideas were narrow and bigoted; she wished to do right, but she had a most unpleasant way of doing it. Once put a notion in her head and it was impossible to drive it out again. Her settled opinion was, that what was right for Tom must be right for Harry, and that if a thing was advisable on Monday, it was advisable on Tuesday. It was in the fulfilment of this theory, that she was marching up and down the drive of Glebe Royal after a soaking shower at five o'clock in the afternoon. The damp ground made her feet cold and her frame shiver. She was swallowing the rising mists in an unlimited quantity, but she knew it was healthy exercise to walk for an hour every day, so she would have done it had the heavens rained fire. Not only that, but she would have left no stone unturned to make her friends do the same, for herein

lay the disagreeable part of Anna Chichester's character, she could not be contented with carrying out her own ideas of right. She wanted to force everybody else to think and do exactly the same as she did. The rapidly approaching shades of evening, which threatened to obscure the outer landscape, had made the inside of the house look still more gloomy. The servants had lighted the lamps in the hall and passages, but Lady Chichester had refused to let them illuminate the drawing-room in which she sat, and the vast apartment was full of fitful shadows. The huge log of wood that lay smouldering on the hearth, and threw up a flickering flame every now and then, made the subjects of the paintings that hung on the walls, and the statuary that stood in the corners look almost ghostly. But Lady Chichester had no fear of ghosts, unless they were the ghosts of the past, and was thinking only of herself and her ailments, as she cowered on a sofa close to the fire, and wondered what could be the matter with her that she felt so ill. She was a slight, frail-looking woman of about forty, round whose attenuated figure a white woolen shawl was wrapt so closely that hardly anything was to be seen of her but her face. She had been very pretty in her girlish days—one of those fairy-like, ethereal creatures that strong, vigorous men delight in, for their very contrast to themselves—but all the beauty was gone now, and only the fragility remained. Her hair had become scanty and was thickly streaked with grey; her large blue eyes gazed at you with a shrinking, scared expression that betrayed she had no confidence in herself or in her

own opinions—if she possessed any. As she sat there in the gathering gloom, she did not appear to make any effort to employ or amuse herself. A ball of wool and some knitting pins, with the first volume of a novel, certainly lay on a small table beside her, but she did not seem to have made any progress with either. Lady Chichester was only wondering vaguely if she should soon feel better again, or if she were going to die, and if you had offered her the choice of the two, she would probably have chosen the latter. For she loved her husband with a meek, mute adoration, felt by few wives in the present day, and she knew she was a burden and an annoyance to him, rather than a pleasure, and that he would be better off if she were gone. She was so absorbed in her own thoughts, that she never heard the hall-door bell ring, and was quite startled when the footman threw open the door and announced "Dr. Jolliffe."

Dr. Jolliffe could not have been better suited with a name, for it sounded so much like "jolly," and he was one of the jolliest people possible. He never entered a house without brightening it up. His cheery voice brought hope and confidence in its train, and desponding hearts, looking doubtfully into the future, took courage from its tones to battle successfully with the disease that threatened to overcome their physical powers.

"Why! how is this?" he exclaimed, as he passed the threshold, "all in the dark? How am I to judge of my patient's looks if I can't see her? With your leave, Lady Chichester, I must request John to light up! I have very sharp eyes, but not sharp enough for this."

"It is so pleasant to sit in the twilight when one is alone," said Lady Chichester in a plaintive voice, as the gas flared up and revealed her features.

"Pleasant perhaps, but not prudent," replied Dr. Jolliffe, as he felt her pulse. "Have you never heard that it is not good for man to be alone, nor woman either? Where is Miss Chichester?"

"I don't know! I have not seen her since luncheon."

"And Sir Alan?"

"O! he is out hunting! Did you not hear there was a meet to-day?"

"No! Why didn't you call for me in the carriage and take me to it? I should have enjoyed the sight. Did you go?"

"I? O! doctor," replied Lady Chichester, deprecatingly.

"Well, and why not? It was a lovely morning, though it has ended in rain. It would have done you good. The fact is, you shut yourself too much up in the house, Lady Chichester! I shall have to lay my orders on Sir Alan to see that you drive out every day. We shall have you ill, if this goes on."

"O! doctor, I *am* ill," returned Lady Chichester, shivering and drawing her woolen shawl still closer. "Sometimes I think I shall never be any better, that I am going to die."

The doctor laughed long and heartily.

"*Going to die!* So you are! You are quite right, my dear lady, and so am I, and Sir Alan and everyone dies in due course of time. But we won't order our coffins just yet."

"But what use am I?" she said earnestly. "My good, true Alan is as kind to me as he can be, but I am only a drag upon his daily life. We can share nothing in common now, and of late I have felt much worse than usual."

"Tell me all your symptoms, never mind how trifling, and I will give you a true opinion on them," he answered her. He sat, silent and attentive, whilst his patient gave various details concerning herself, but his eye twinkled occasionally as he listened, and there was just the suspicion of a smile about his mouth.

"Now, my dear lady," he said as she concluded, "you're not ill at all, and I'm going to make you as right as a trivet."

"O! doctor."

"It's gospel truth, and the first thing I prescribe is exercise. You *must* take gentle exercise daily, either by driving or walking."

"But I cannot walk, I am too weak."

"Then you must go in your carriage until you regain the use of your legs. And you must have more society! It's enough to make anybody feel ill to sit by herself all day. What is Miss Chichester about to leave you alone like this? Why isn't she here to amuse and divert you?"

"Anna has always had her own apartments at Glebe Royal, and occupied them as she saw fit. Besides, I would rather be by myself, Dr. Jolliffe. My sister-in-law and I have never been very close friends, nor thought alike on the same subjects, and anything approaching a discussion is sure to upset me. I am better alone."

"You are no such thing, my lady, and I must see Sir Alan on the subject. You need cheerful society, and you must have it."

"But I dislike evening and dinner parties exceedingly. It is quite a trial to me to preside at one. I dread that Sir Alan should see how incapable I am of amusing his guests, and lately he has been good enough to excuse me from appearing at table, and let his sister do the honors instead."

"A great mistake on Sir Alan's part," replied Dr. Jolliffe impatiently, "but I was not alluding to parties at all. What you require is a cheerful companion to remain with you all day, and to share your walks or drives. Now, what would you say to having some nice, bright, warm-hearted girl to run after you wherever you went, to read aloud to you, or play and sing perhaps, and make herself generally useful."

Lady Chichester's pale cheeks actually flushed.

"I should like it very much, I think, doctor, but I know of no young people. I have no nieces, or cousins with whom I am intimate, or—or—" with a deep sigh, "children."

"I know that, but everything can be got in this world with money, and there are plenty of young ladies who would only be too thankful to come to a home like this! I wish *I* was a young lady, Lady Chichester, *I* would jump at the offer! Glebe Royal is a little paradise."

"That is just what I used to say when I first came to it," replied Lady Chichester with another sigh, "and to think it must pass away to strangers! No

wonder it makes Sir Alan sad to speak of it! Sometimes he says he'll chuck the whole thing up and go abroad to end his days."

Dr. Jolliffe laughed again in his hearty reassuring way.

"Nonsense! Nonsense! Sir Alan is only making fun of you. He knows a trick worth two of that! And what may your ladyship's book be?" touching the volume on the table—"anything new from Mudie?"

"Yes! Mr. Rider Haggard's 'She.' A startling story, doctor, and very improbable. But the print is rather small and my eyes ache, else I was getting very much interested in it. Fancy! a woman living for a thousand years! Could such a thing ever have really happened?"

"I'll go far towards making you live for a thousand years if you'll follow my advice," said the doctor.

She actually laughed. Such a thin quavery little ghost of a laugh as it was, and yet so unused to make itself heard that it was almost immediately succeeded by tears.

"If you could make me just a little like my former self, a little more like what I was when Alan married me," she faltered, "I should be so happy."

"So I will," he rejoined, "if you'll only be good. Now, will you promise me to go out driving to-morrow morning, wet or dry?"

"Wet or dry?"

"Certainly. In the open carriage if it should be dry (which I think it will), and in a close one, if it proves rainy. Drive to Gambletown and back, and

bring me a new pair of dogskin gloves from Munster's to prove you've been there. Is it a bargain?"

"Yes, doctor, if you really consider it necessary."

"It is more than necessary. It is *imperative*. I want to bring the roses back to your cheeks, Lady Chichester, and the gloss to your hair. You are not doing yourself justice at all. You will look ten years younger when you have been for a week in the open air."

"I will go, indeed I will go," she replied quite eagerly; "but it is almost as lonely driving by oneself, as sitting here by oneself."

"Take 'She' with you then, and fancy you are sitting on the sofa at home. Before long I hope we shall have secured someone who will talk to you and amuse you whether you are out or in. I ought to have thought of it long ago."

He rose to take his leave, holding her pulse again for a few seconds between his fingers before he did so. The touch seemed to inspire him with some hope.

"You are not so ill as you imagine, Lady Chichester, by a very long way, indeed; I shall not be surprised if a few months sees you entirely restored to health. Take heart and resolve to be well. Then, you *will* be well! Good-bye."

He left his patient still weak, trembling and scared looking, but he left hope behind him, and a more contented look settled down upon her countenance as she sank back upon the sofa, and resumed her perusal of "She."

Meanwhile Dr. Jolliffe having assumed his top-coat and an enormous woolen comforter (which he

wound about half a dozen times round his throat) in the hall, took his umbrella and turned out into the open air, when he ran straight up against Miss Chichester, who had walked for exactly sixty minutes by the stable clock.

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CHAPTER II.

HOME FROM HUNTING.

"HULLO, Doctor Jolliffe!" exclaimed the lady in her discourteous manner. "What on earth are you here for?" (For amongst Miss Chichester's pet aversions she classed the entire medical fraternity, whom she commonly designated as a set of cheats and fools.)

"That's not a very polite way in which to welcome a visitor to Glebe Royal, Miss Chichester," replied the doctor good-humoredly. "Suppose I came especially to make a call upon yourself!"

"O! you know me better than that! You know I would rather die a natural death at any time than be forced out of the world by your filthy pills and potions. You can keep them to kill yourself with. You'll never get *me* to swallow them."

Her rudeness, unaccompanied by the slightest pleasantry, had no effect upon the doctor, who only laughed at it in his usual hearty manner.

"I am quite aware of it, Miss Chichester, and I never intend to ask you; moreover, I am Christian enough to be able to add, that I hope you'll never feel the want of them. No! I didn't come to see you. My visit was to Lady Chichester! I thought she looked ill in church yesterday, and that I might venture to offer her a little advice."

"Alice ill! Fudge! She's lazy! That's what you mean."

"Indeed I do not, and if you will walk back with me to the drive gates, I should like to speak to you about her."

"All right," replied Miss Chichester, wheeling round. "If Alice would only come out and walk down the drive with you, herself, she wouldn't need either your advice or any of your dirty messes."

"I agree with you there, but that would argue she had as fine a constitution as yourself; and unfortunately she has not. She is very feeble and ener-vated; in fact there is no doubt she is ill."

"What's the matter with her?" demanded his companion curtly.

"*That* I am not quite prepared to say."

"You doctors never *are* prepared to say anything. You always have to go home and grub in your books before you can form an opinion. And then you're generally wrong."

"I am aware that you have not a very high opinion of the medical profession, Miss Chichester; still, I have pretty well made up my mind regarding her ladyship's symptoms, but I decline to disclose my surmise at present. What I wish to consult you about, is the treatment necessary to her case. She must not be allowed to mope."

"Mope! Who makes her mope?"

"I call it '*moping*' to sit alone for the greater part of the day, like Lady Chichester, unemployed and brooding (as she evidently does) on melancholy subjects. I want more life and sunshine for her."

"But, bless you, man," cried Miss Chichester, stopping short on the gravel drive, and arresting his

attention with a violent dig from her umbrella, "why doesn't she take them, then? She's alive, and she's got legs! But she won't stir from the sofa! She won't even go out in the carriage, and as for a walk such as I have just been taking, why she'd die straight off at the thought of it. She's a fool, that's what she is, and always has been," concluded Miss Chichester resuming her walk.

"You're too hard upon her, indeed you are! You cannot judge of her capabilities by your own. Lady Chichester is naturally of a very delicate constitution, and has increased her physical weakness by giving in to it. She wants rousing and encouraging, and more cheerful society."

"Cheerful society! Isn't Sir Alan cheerful? One of the happiest dispositions possible, and active and vigorous as can be! All the greater misfortune for him to be tied to such a useless creature as Alice."

"Your brother is everything you say, Miss Chichester, but then he possesses an unusual amount of strength and vitality, and his habits have become a second nature. But he is very seldom with Lady Chichester. She does not see much of him."

"How can she when she scarcely ever leaves the house?"

"And has almost arrived at the pitch when she is incapable of leaving it. Well! if she can't go out, she must have companionship indoors. I *insist* upon it; and shall take the earliest opportunity to tell Sir Alan so."

Dr. Jolliffe spoke so unusually gravely and decidedly (for him) that Miss Chichester became a little alarmed.

"Is Alice really ill?" she asked.

"She *will* be if my orders are not attended to."

"But I am a great deal with her! I have lived at Glebe Royal ever since my brother's marriage twenty years ago. I always meet my sister-in-law at meals."

"That is not sufficient, and excuse me for saying I want a younger and more congenial companion for Lady Chichester than yourself, someone who will be always with her, to sing or play and suggest means of amusement, who will let her have her own way, in fact, and not argue with or contradict her."

Miss Chichester tossed her head.

"And pray where will you find this *rara avis*? They don't grow in Glebe Royal."

"We must advertise for one."

"You mean to engage a hired companion for Lady Chichester. I won't allow it."

"Then I must speak to Sir Alan myself on the subject. I thought you might have paved the way for me, but it is no matter. I shall call in again shortly. Good-evening."

And, without offering to shake hands with her, Dr. Jolliffe passed through the drive gates and left Miss Chichester alone. It was very dark and very damp as she stood there for a few minutes looking after his retreating figure, and almost wishing she had not spoken so hastily. But the proposal had annoyed her. They were very conservative at Glebe Royal, and the idea of a stranger being admitted to the family circle, to hear all their secrets and be a constant spy upon their actions, was very distasteful to her. Added to which her pride was hurt at the idea

that her society was not considered sufficient for her sister-in-law. She had lived under the same roof as Alice ever since Sir Alan had brought her home to Glebe Royal, a blushing, shy girl of twenty, had nursed her in her rough unsympathetic way through her illnesses, and been regarded in every respect as an elder sister. And now this doctor (who was as great a fool as the rest of his profession) threatened to depose her, and set up a stranger in her place. She waited at the drive gates for fully twenty minutes watching for the return of her brother and his friend, Captain Henry Fauntleroy, from hunting, and when they arrived, muddy and splashed, she placed her gauntleted hand on Sir Alan's saddlebow, and commenced to march up the drive with him in that position.

"Take care, Anna," said her brother, "'the Squire' and I are dreadfully dirty. We came a cropper over the last brook in Tangle field. He will soil your dress if you walk so close to him."

"Rubbish! What do I care for a little mud? I'm not made of sugar, like Alice. By the way, Dr. Jolliffe has just been talking to me about her. He thinks she's ill."

If the evening shadows had not already commenced to fall, Miss Chichester would have seen the change that passed suddenly upon her brother's face. He and his wife had drifted very far asunder in the last few years, but she had been the one love of his life, and he would never quite forget it.

"*Ill!*" he reiterated quickly, "what's the matter? Surely nothing serious!"

Miss Chichester gave a kind of snort of contempt.

"I only said that Jolliffe thinks she's ill, and you must know what fools these doctors are. For my own part I don't believe a word of it! Alice is a chilly mortal and somewhat lazy, and she won't go out this weather. If she did, she'd be all the better for it. But Jolliffe declares she requires amusement, and we must get a companion for her."

"A companion!" repeated Sir Alan knitting his brows, "a companion, when she has *me*!"

"And *me* too! That's just what *I* said, but he was obstinate, and declared he should speak to you himself on the subject."

"I shall send down the groom to ask him to come up again to-night," said her brother as he dismounted at the hall door. "I shan't rest till I've heard the truth of it. Alice ill! Why! I have never heard her make the slightest complaint!"

He turned abruptly from his sister and his friend as he spoke, and walked straight into the drawing-room, where his wife was lying on the couch before the fire, with her book in her hand. But she had heard his footstep, and her large eyes were turned towards the door, expectantly. As she caught sight of him, and saw that he had not stayed to change his dress, before seeking her presence, her pale face lighted up with pleasure which increased to the verge of making her tremble, as he came up to her side and kissed her. He was a man to be proud of. His two and forty years had but perfected his muscular figure until assimilated with his height. He had a small head, covered with close-cropped curling hair, brown

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eyes, a well-formed nose, and a full-lipped mouth shaded by a heavy moustache. His pink coat and top-boots and breeches suited him admirably, and he appeared to be (as indeed he was) the essence of manly strength and vitality. He looked as if he could have taken the fragile woman on the sofa and crushed her between his finger and thumb, and some feeling of this sort, some sense of the vast gulf that yawned between them with the passing years, had done more to estrange them than anything else.

How could a man who reveled in hunting, shooting, fishing and all other manly sports, to whom, indeed, they were essentially necessary as part of his existence, derive much enjoyment from the society of a wife too feeble to accompany him anywhere? And she had never given him any children. *That* was the great secret disappointment of Sir Alan Chichester's life. How often, when she had been the one great passion of his boyhood, his promised bride, as yet unclaimed, had he not dreamed with the confidence of two and twenty years of the sons and daughters she would bring him, and of whom he should be so proud, because they belonged to his pretty, fairy-like Alice, with her wild-rose complexion and her dainty ways! And then came marriage, but without the realization of that boyish dream! The wild-rose bloom on Alice's cheek had faded into pallor, and the dainty ways had degenerated into lassitude, for Lady Chichester was also a disappointed and unhappy woman. She recognized that, though from no fault of her own, she was a failure, and that her husband could never look at her without remembering that his vast estates and riches and title must

pass at his death to strangers, because she had borne no son to inherit them. Miss Chichester too—with the pride of a member of an old county family—felt the disappointment almost as keenly as themselves, and many a bitter hint or allusion from her lips had made Lady Chichester's lot more hard to bear. But through it all, the wife had adored her husband, perhaps all the more so because she felt as if she had innocently wronged him, and *he*—well! he loved her still (or thought he did) that is to say; waves of tenderness for her would sweep over him occasionally, when he remembered what she *had* been, but when he ha' remained for a few minutes in her society he generally contrived to escape from it to that of his male companions, so opposite had they grown in all their tastes, opinions and pursuits. Miss Chichester's intelligence, however, had awakened one of those sudden ebullitions of feeling to which Sir Alan was subject, and as he embraced his wife he asked her quite affectionately,

"Well, little woman, and what's the matter with you?"

"Matter! dear Alan! Nothing at all that I know of. Only I feel very tired sometimes, and good for nothing. Dr. Jolliffe has been here."

"So Anna tells me! What did he say?"

"He said he would make me quite well if I would obey his orders."

"Then you must obey them. By Jove! I wish you could come out hunting with me! *That* would set up. You should have tried it twenty years ago, Alice, when I wanted to teach you."

"Ah! Alan! I was always too silly and timid to

make a good horsewoman! All your instructions were so much time thrown away."

"You would have been a different woman if you had followed my advice. It would have put new life into you. You should have seen the run we had to-day. Straight as the crow flies, from Brierly Downs to Tanglewood, and without a check. 'The Squire' and I came to grief over the last brook. The bank was so soft from the rain, he couldn't get a grip of it, so we both flopped in."

"Not in the water," exclaimed Lady Chichester in a voice of terror.

"Of course in the water! head over ears! How could we 'flop' on dry land? Hullo! what's the matter with you?"

For even that excitement had been too much for Lady Chichester's enfeebled frame, and she had sunk back upon her sofa cushions in a faint. Sir Alan rang the bell furiously. The sight of extreme weakness did not soften, it rather hardened him. He believed so fully in the arrogance of his own strength that it was quite avoidable. He ordered the servant who answered the bell to send Lady Chichester's maid to her assistance at once, and as soon as Jane Wood appeared, he resigned his wife into her charge.

"I can't imagine what's the matter with your mistress, Jane! She's always fainting now-a-days!" he said in a tone of annoyance. "You mustn't encourage it. It's the worst thing possible for her to give way."

"I encourage it, Sir Alan!" exclaimed the maid, "you're quite mistaken! I'd lay down my life for her ladyship! But it's my belief that she's very ill, poor dear! very ill indeed."

CHAPTER III.

MASCULINE CONFIDENCES.

ALTHOUGH Sir Alan did not entirely believe the old servant's statement, yet, combined with his sister's information, it sufficed to make him both thoughtful and silent at the dinner table, at which Lady Chichester was unable to appear. Captain Fauntleroy was the only guest staying at Glebe Royal at the time—indeed he was so constant a visitor there, that he was almost regarded as one of the family. Although some seven years the junior of his host, they had been students at school and college together, and these youthful friendships are often the strongest of all. Anyway, it had proved so in their case. Henry Fauntleroy had neither the good looks nor the good fortune of his friend, but their difference in worldly position had never been an obstacle to the course of their affection, and whenever he could obtain a few days' leave, he ran down to Hampshire to spend them at Glebe Royal. He had been intimate with Lady Chichester therefore ever since her marriage, when he had been a stripling, newly emerged from his Eton jackets, and allowed to take all sorts of liberties with the bride, just because he was so young. He had called her "Alice" in those days, with the full approbation of the bridegroom, and he had called her "Alice" ever since. As soon as the servants had withdrawn their presence, and Miss Chichester had

stalked out of the room, saying in a very hoarse voice that she would go and inquire after her sister-in-law, Captain Fauntleroy drew his chair closer to that of his friend and asked the reason of his unusual mood.

"What's the matter, old chum?" he said affectionately. "Anything happened to vex you?"

"It's only this business about my wife," replied Sir Alan, lighting his pipe (for they were Bohemian enough to smoke in the dining-room at Glebe Royal), "she fainted again just before dinner."

"But that's nothing new, is it? She's always fainting or something?"

"You're right, Hal! That's where the shoe pinches! I've been married twenty years, and I might just as well be a bachelor for any good Alice is to me."

"That's not her fault, however."

"I didn't say it was her fault," returned the baronet, with the nearest approach to ill-humor his happy disposition could command, "but it makes it none the less hard to bear. I've come to the conclusion that marriage is a mistake, Hal—the greatest mistake one can make."

"Come! Come! you're the last man in the world who should say that, Alan! Why, Alice positively adores you—I always quote you among my acquaintance as the luckiest fellow I know."

"That doesn't disprove the truth of my assertion. Hal! It's the condition of marriage that I condemn. See what it has done for me! Tied me for life to an invalid, who can neither join in my pursuits and amusements, nor look after my establishment as she should do. We have almost had to give up entertain-

ing on account of it, for the ladies don't care to come to a house where the mistress scarcely ever shows herself, and my sister (though an excellent, well-meaning woman) is not a genial hostess."

"Poor Alice," said Fauntleroy, "and she was such a lovely creature when you married her! Boy as I was, I can remember how I admired her sweet, blushing face and her shy, girlish ways. She was my type of womanhood."

"Ah! fight shy of those ethereal, angelic-looking women for yourself, Hal. Take warning by me, and choose a wife with more flesh and blood in her, and less spirituality. It may be very pretty to look at, my boy, but it isn't healthy. Transparent complexions, fragile forms, and varying blushes, mean hysteria, dyspepsia and consumption, and anything but a woman fit to bring your children into the world! Look at me now with this splendid estate on which I, and my father, and my grandfather were all born and reared,—and I have to keep it up, and spend money on it, for some distant cousin, or other, to inherit after me!—so distant that I don't really know, if I died to-morrow, who would be my heir. And we—whose names have been known in the country for generations past! It is too hard! Do you think I don't remember it every time I walk over the estate, and curse my folly for not having had more foresight?"

"Poor Alice!" reiterated Captain Fauntleroy, with a sigh.

"And I think you might add poor Alan. The fact is, every nation manages their marriages better

than we do ! They should be ordered as they were in ancient Rome, and not declared valid until the woman has borne a son."

"Come, old man, you don't mean what you say," replied his friend soothingly. "I know the want of an heir has been a great disappointment to you, but, after all, marriage was instituted for something higher and holier than that, and I am sure that you would not change your wife for any woman in the world."

At this direct thrust Sir Alan looked rather conscious.

"Well ! perhaps not ! I married her from feelings of affection only ! No one knows that better than yourself, and she is undoubtedly very fond of me. Still, I maintain that it is very hard for a man of two and forty, with every capability for enjoyment, to be chained to a sick woman, who looks ten years older than himself, and who leaves him to go about the world without companionship or counsel. Honestly, Hal, Alice is not of the least possible comfort to me."

"I grant that, Alan, and I realize the difficulties of the position ; still they might have been worse. You might have married a wife who was indifferent to you —or even deserted you ! Here am I at six and thirty, a bachelor and likely to remain so, and all because a confounded jilt thought fit to play fast and loose with me."

"How was that, Hal ? You have never mentioned it before."

"Perhaps not ! I don't care to parade my wounds for the inspection of the public ! I only spoke of it now to show you that others suffer as well as yourself, though in a different way."

"Tell me about it, old boy! We have never had any secrets from each other."

"There is not much to tell. It happened five years ago, when we were stationed at Plymouth. I met one of those beautiful Devonshire girls—‘Devonshire witches’ they call them, and I am sure she bewitched me—and I fell desperately in love with her. I had never experienced a real passion before, you see," added Captain Fauntleroy almost apologetically; "and where a man doesn't take the measles until he is over thirty, he generally takes them badly. I fully intended to marry the girl—for she was the most fascinating creature I have ever met—and I believed her to be fond of me, because she always said so, and flirted with me outrageously for months, but, when I plucked up courage to propose to her, she put me off in the neatest manner possible, by declaring she was under age (I am sure she was *not* though), and had no power under her late father's will of marrying without the consent of her guardian and trustee. I demanded an introduction to this worthy, who dismissed my suit on account of my poverty with an insolence that made every drop of blood in my body boil."

"Did the lady approve his action?"

"Of course she *said* she didn't, but I had seen enough of the determination of her character to be sure that, had she chosen, she could have held her own against a dozen guardians. But she did not love me—she had only been amusing herself at my expense—that was the truth of it, and when I discovered the truth, I left her. But not unscathed,

Alan! I shall be a bachelor to my life's end for her sake."

"Such a woman is not worth the regret of a lifetime," replied the baronet. "Try your luck once more, old man! There are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it! I only wish I had your chance of choosing again."

"Don't say *that*, Alan," cried Fauntleroy earnestly, "for it is not true; cherish a sweet pure angel like Alice whilst you have her, for you don't know how many she-devils there are walking about the world in robes of light."

Sir Alan was about to make some caustic reply when the footman appeared to announce the arrival of Dr. Jolliffe.

"Show him in here," he exclaimed, and then, as the doctor appeared, he continued in his own genial manner, "Ah! Doctor! how are you? Sit down and take a glass of wine with us! It's good of you to come up here for the second time to-day, but I feel rather anxious to hear what you think of Lady Chichester."

"I will leave you together," said Fauntleroy, rising from his chair.

"Not at all," cried Sir Alan, and, "not at all, sir," repeated the doctor. "Had I any private communication to make concerning her ladyship, I should have asked to see Sir Alan in another room."

"Then you don't consider her so very ill," remarked the baronet, returning to his pipe.

"No, not very ill—decidedly," said Dr. Jolliffe slowly; "but in a condition requiring the utmost care."

"She has nothing actually the matter with her, then?"

"I don't say that, Sir Alan!"

"You are very mysterious, doctor!"

"Say rather, very cautious. In some cases we are compelled to be so, and, to tell you the honest truth, I am not prepared to give a decided opinion upon her ladyship. There are symptoms present which might portend very different issues. But I have quite made up my mind on *one* thing."

"What is that?"

"That Lady Chichester must not be permitted to lead her present life for a day longer than is necessary. She wants more brightness and cheerfulness infused into her, Sir Alan. She needs rousing from the apathy into which she has fallen. She mustn't be left alone to read or work, or brood by herself! She must have constant pleasant society to amuse and distract her."

"Won't it be sufficient if my sister makes a point of always remaining with her? I am sure she would do it, if it is for Lady Chichester's good."

Dr. Jolliffe made a grimace and shook his head.

"No! Sir Alan, no! This is a question on which I must have my own way, even at the risk of offending you. Miss Chichester is not at all the sort of companion for her ladyship. She is too hard—too unsympathetic—too autocratic, in fact. I want someone younger, softer and more lovable. I have known you long enough, I hope, to be able to say this."

"O! yes! It's all right! I know Anna can make herself very disagreeable at times. What, then, do you propose?"

"I want you to engage some young person as Lady Chichester's companion."

"Confound it! How am I to set about the business? I don't know where 'companions' are to be found! There are none round Glebe Royal. There never was a place so destitute of girls."

"Just so! and they wouldn't be the right sort of girls if you found them. Will you let me help you in the matter, Sir Alan? I have a married brother in practice in London, and his wife has often helped me out of a difficulty. If I have your permission to tell her what we require, she will soon send down the right person from town for us."

"If you are *quite* sure it is necessary," replied Sir Alan; "but I must say that I hate the idea of a stranger about the house."

"This young lady, if she knows her duty, will not intrude upon Sir Alan. She will come here to devote her energies exclusively to Lady Chichester! She will read aloud to her, and play and sing if required—arrange her needlework, write her letters, carry her messages, and accompany her out driving or walking—behave herself, in fact, as if she had the good luck to be her ladyship's daughter! And if she doesn't do all this—if she doesn't prove satisfactory, we must send her back, and try another! It is the first prescription I order for Lady Chichester."

"And you think it will cure her?"

"I think it will have a beneficial effect on her health, whatever may succeed it. For I will not conceal from Sir Alan that her ladyship's condition is *not* satisfactory. You must see that for yourself.

These constant fainting fits, without any palpable cause, are not the right thing at all!"

"And yet you can't tell what they proceed from," said Sir Alan moodily.

"I decline to say what I think, until I am sure," replied Dr. Jolliffe; "but when I *am* sure, you shall be the first to benefit by the discovery. Meanwhile, I do not consider her ladyship in any immediate danger, and the more you distract her mind from dwelling on herself, the better she will be. And now I will go home and write that letter to my sister-in-law, and I shall hope, in a few days, to have some news for you. Good-evening."

"It's all d——d unsatisfactory, it seems to me," grumbled Sir Alan, when the doctor had disappeared; "he doesn't seem to have the least idea what's the matter with Alice, and as for a companion doing her any good, I don't believe it. I detest the idea of some vulgar, apple-cheeked girl about Glebe Royal—some creature, half servant, half lady, not fit for the kitchen, and not good enough for the drawing-room! Alice ought to have more spirit than to consent to such an arrangement. If I could only make her shake off her confounded laziness, and go out walking with Anna, she'd be well enough."

But notwithstanding his grumbling, Henry Fauntleroy observed that, as soon as he had finished smoking, Sir Alan walked up to his wife's dressing-room and remained there for the remainder of the evening.

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CHAPTER IV.

LADY CHICHESTER'S COMPANION.

DR. JOLLIFFE was as good as his word. He wrote a full description of what he wanted to his sister-in-law before he went to bed that night, and in the course of a few days he received the following reply :

" My DEAR ANDREW,

" Your request that I should look out for a suitable companion for Lady Chichester reached me at an opportune moment, as I had just promised to find a nurse to accompany a patient of your brother's to India, so I was able to prosecute search for both parties at the same time, and I believe that I have been successful. I have seen several young ladies who are anxious to obtain the situation, but one amongst them strikes me as especially suitable. Her name is Charlotte Murray, her age (she tells me) is twenty-four, but she looks older. She is apparently quick, sensible and well educated, speaks perfectly, and has every appearance of a lady. She is a pleasant looking young woman also, and very modest in her demeanor ; her references are good. She is an orphan, but I have seen her uncle and guardian, who is evidently a gentleman of birth, though in poor circumstances, or (as he told me) nothing would induce him to allow his niece to earn her own living. He showed me a letter from her last employer, now in America, speaking in the highest terms of Miss Murray's devotion to his daughter (now deceased), and of his own gratitude to her. Miss Murray sang and played to me ; she seems to be a competent musician. She also speaks French and German, having been educated abroad. She asks one hundred pounds a year as salary, and I scarcely think your friends will obtain what they require for less.

"Let me hear what you think about it as soon as possible, that I may give the young lady her answer. She is very anxious it should be in the affirmative."

"I am, dear Andrew,

"Your affectionate sister-in-law,

"MARGARET JOLLIFFE.

"P.S.—Joseph says that Miss Murray is more than pleasant looking, that she is very handsome. Doubtless you gentlemen are better judges in such matters than myself, but I still adhere to my own opinion."

Dr. Jolliffe read this letter two or three times over before he replaced it in the envelope.

"Yes," he said to himself, "Miss Murray sounds promising. Margaret is such a severe judge of her own sex, that she has probably made less of her attractions than they really are, and a girl with such accomplishments must necessarily be quick witted. I think we must try Miss Charlotte Murray. I will walk up to Glebe Royal and ask Sir Alan's opinion on the subject at once."

Sir Alan's opinion did not prove to be worth much. He was still opposed, in his own mind, to his wife's having a companion, but as the doctor considered it necessary, of course it must be so. Only he wished that they would arrange the matter among themselves without any reference to him. He knew no more about it than he did about engaging Lady Chichester's maid. If Jolliffe considered it all right, he had better send for the girl. Miss Chichester was even less cordial than her brother, on being called to a consultation on Miss Murray's probable fitness for the post of companion to her sister-in-law. She sniffed and snorted and declared openly that she had

never given her consent to such a thing, and declined to give her opinion. Alice had better decide for herself.

And then Lady Chichester was appealed to, and, on the letter being read to her, turned her scared eyes first on Alan and then on Anna, and finding no help from them, begged Dr. Jolliffe to do as he thought best, and so the doctor followed his own instincts, and sent word to London to have Miss Murray engaged at once, and sent down to Glebe Royal as soon as might be convenient to herself. When he had been advised of the train by which the young lady would arrive, he walked down to the station to meet her. The Glebe Royal carriage, with a couple of horses and a couple of men servants, was there before him (for whatever Sir Alan Chichester's disposition might be, he never forgot what was due to himself), but Dr. Jolliffe stood on the platform determined that it should not carry the new-comer away until he had an interview with her. When the train arrived, there was but one passenger for Glebe Royal, and he knew at once that it must be the person he waited for—a tall, slight figure, modestly attired in a dark traveling ulster, and a black hat with a thick gauze veil tied round it which almost concealed her features. She was standing still, until the porters should secure her luggage, when the doctor accosted her.

"Miss Charlotte Murray, I presume."

She turned quickly at his words, and the doctor saw a pair of large dark eyes with strongly marked brows regarding him curiously.

"Am I speaking to Sir Alan Chichester?" she asked.

"O! dear no! My name is Jolliffe. I am the brother-in-law of the lady who engaged you. I am also Lady Chichester's medical adviser. And before you go to Glebe Royal I should like to have a few words with you respecting her ladyship."

"O! certainly! Have they sent any vehicle for me?"

"Yes, the carriage is waiting."

"Then perhaps we can drive on together, and you can say what you wish to me on the journey," she answered, in a perfectly assured voice.

The doctor was a little puzzled. He couldn't make her out. Instead of a shy and somewhat nervous dependent, coming for the first time to a new situation, Miss Murray appeared and spoke more like a guest who was about to confer an honor on Glebe Royal by her company. However, he agreed to her proposal and entered the carriage with her, and, having asked the coachman to drive slowly, at once opened the conversation.

"Doubtless Mrs. Jolliffe informed you, Miss Murray, that Lady Chichester is a great invalid, in fact she has so given way of late years to nervous debility and depression of spirits that she has become almost incapable of controlling her actions."

"Do you mean that she is out of her mind?" demanded the stranger coolly.

"Dear me, no! nothing of the sort, only she is lamentably weak and inert. She lies all day on the sofa, and believes herself unable to appear at the

dinner-table, or take the slightest exercise. Now, this is all fancy! She *can* walk and she *must* walk, or drive daily, and be encouraged to move about the house. I understand you are an excellent musician. Lady Chichester was at one time devoted to music. Try and rouse her interest in it again. Read and talk to her, and make her laugh if possible. Keep her mind interested as much as you can, and never discuss her own symptoms with her, for I wish her, if possible, to forget that she is ill."

"You think she won't live," remarked Miss Murray.

The doctor started. He *did* think so, but he did not care for his thoughts being read in such an off-hand manner, and he refuted the suggestion almost angrily.

"Certainly *not!* I am surprised you should say such a thing, and I beg you will not breathe a hint of it at Glebe Royal. Sir Alan is devoted to his wife, and the mere idea would make him miserable. All that Lady Chichester needs is cheering up, and it is with the hope that a young and bright companion may have that effect upon her that you have been sent for."

"I will do my best, of course," replied Miss Murray. The carriage was turning into the park gates by this time, and Dr. Jolliffe thought he had better get down.

"There is no need for me to go further," he said; "you know what is required of you now, and I am sure you will do your utmost to second our endeavors and to carry them out."

"But why quit me?" urged the young lady; "since your patient is so nervous, surely it would be better for you to stay and introduce me to her? When the first introduction is over, you can leave us to make friends with each other with greater confidence."

"You are a bright girl," replied Dr. Jolliffe admiringly, "and I feel sure we shall get on together. You are right. I will take you myself into the presence of her ladyship."

As he handed her from the carriage at the hall door he asked the servant if Sir Alan was at home.

"No, sir," replied the man; "Sir Alan has driven the captain over to Broxton in the dog-cart. The captain leaves to-day for Cork, sir."

"O indeed! I didn't know he was going so soon. Is her ladyship in the drawing-room?"

"Yes, sir," and in another minute their names had been announced to Lady Chichester. The poor little woman was standing by her sofa as they entered the room, trembling all over with the dread and anticipation of meeting a stranger, but Dr. Jolliffe went up to her at once, and took her reassuringly by the hand.

"Here, my lady, is Miss Murray," he exclaimed, "ready to do all in her power to help and assist you. Miss Murray and I have been having a long talk together as we drove up from the station, and I am sure that she fully understands what will be required of her."

"I am afraid she will find it so dull here, all alone with me. I am such poor company," replied her ladyship in a deprecating voice.

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"I feel sure that I shall do nothing of the sort, Lady Chichester," said the new-comer in her rich tones, "that is, if you permit me to be your companion. I love the country dearly, and all country amusements, and you will never hear me complain of dullness whilst I have music, and literature, and your society."

Lady Chichester seemed suddenly to gain courage from the other's confidence. It was a case of the stronger mind controlling the weaker.

"O! my dear," she exclaimed, "you have a beautiful voice! Do take off your veil and let me see your face!"

The young lady gave a low laugh, as she disengaged herself from her headgear, and stood revealed to her employer. What a contrast they formed to one another! It took the doctor's breath away to look at them. They were as opposite in appearance as a damask rose and a lily of the valley. And yet, at first sight, Miss Murray did not appear to possess any particular beauty. She had large dark eyes with straight black brows, a nose too short to be symmetrical, and a large mouth with red lips and a set of perfect teeth. But she possessed physical vitality to an extraordinary degree. Her face glowed with health, you might almost see the electric fluid in her blue-black hair, and her upright form was the embodiment of feminine vigor. As she stood before them she seemed to make Lady Chichester shrivel to half her former size, and the sickly pallor of her complexion to take on darker shades, but the force of the contrast did not strike the one who suffered from it.

On the contrary, she seemed to be attracted by the very difference between them, and to bask in her new companion's physical powers, as a sick man basks in the sun.

"O ! my dear !" she cried, admiringly, "you are beautiful ! How I wish I had your robust appearance ! You will be quite a tower of strength to me. Doctor, you have brought me someone I can lean upon. How shall I ever be able to thank you ! But Miss Murray will be glad of a cup of tea after her journey. Please ring the bell. And take off your heavy cloak, my dear. This room must feel very warm to you."

Upon which Miss Murray divested herself of her ulster, and shewed she possessed a perfect figure, well developed—round and supple.

Lady Chichester had become quite excited. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes shone, and she kept moving about the room in a restless, nervous manner.

"Will not your ladyship lie down on the sofa and let me serve the tea ?" said Miss Murray as the tray made its appearance. "You must not think me officious, but I suppose this is to be one of my duties, and the sooner I am installed in them the better."

"O my dear Miss Murray, but you must be so tired," expostulated Lady Chichester.

"Not at all. You don't know how strong I am," replied Miss Murray, and having assisted Lady Chichester to the sofa, and placed the *couver-pieds* over her feet, she made and handed her a cup of tea.

"Isn't this nice, doctor?" said her ladyship with a little watery smile, as she sipped her tea ; "so

different from having John to pour it out for me, or even poor old Jane! It takes away my appetite to eat or drink alone."

"I don't think Miss Murray will ever allow you to do that again," replied the doctor, who was secretly delighted at the success of his plan.

"Of course not," said Miss Murray decidedly, "that is if Lady Chichester consents to it. We can have the cosiest little dinners together by the fire when she doesn't feel equal to sitting at the dinner table."

"O my dear, that *will* be good of you!" exclaimed Lady Chichester quite eagerly, "and I really think I *could* eat a little chicken or something if you talked to me the while. And then, when I have gained strength I may be able to go into dinner again as usual."

"Of course. It only requires a little time," said Miss Murray, cheerfully.

And Dr. Jolliffe left them on the high road to friendship and sociability, and chuckling to himself over his own perspicuity of judgment.

CHAPTER V.

THE BARONET IS CONVERTED.

SIR ALAN came home later than usual that evening, and the dinner gong had sounded ten minutes before he entered the hall. He was rather out of sorts too, —partly because a resting horse and a dark road had caused the delay, and partly because he had lost his chum, Fauntleroy, who had received an unexpected summons to rejoin his regiment. Captain Fauntleroy represented his chief interest in life at that moment. He filled the void created by his wife's illness and his sister's uncongeniality with his companionship. Sir Alan entered the house hastily, and threw his thick driving ulster to his servant before he went upstairs.

"Anybody called?" he asked curiously.

"No one, Sir Alan—except the doctor when he brought the young person as is come to wait on her ladyship."

The baronet's brow contracted. He had forgotten all about the "companion."

"Oh! ah! So she has arrived. What is she like?" he was just about to add, when he remembered he was talking to his servant, and substituted, "Where is she?"

"In the drawing-room, Sir Alan, with her lady-

ship. The dinner has just been carried in there. It's ten minutes past seven, Sir Alan."

"All right! Ask Miss Chichester to give me five minutes' grace," he said, as he walked upstairs.

His sister was looking very grim when he joined her. She did not approve of unpunctuality, even in the master of Glebe Royal, and at the age of forty-two. But she had been so accustomed from his birth to regard her brother Alan as the "baby of the family," that she had not got out of the habit of correcting him even now.

After detailing the departure of Henry Fauntleroy, and the reason of his delay, Sir Alan alluded to the matter which was somewhat worrying them both.

"Have you seen the new arrival?" he asked, as the domestics left them for a moment to themselves.

"I have," replied Miss Chichester curtly.

"What is she like? Nice?"

"It is impossible to judge in so short a time. I was only in the drawing-room for a few minutes."

"Is she good-looking?"

Miss Chichester snorted in her peculiar manner.

"I don't know what you may call her. She strongly resembles Sarah Jenkins to my mind." (Sarah Jenkins being a black-eyed, vicious-looking dairy maid lately added to the establishment.)

Sir Alan's face fell.

"Like Jenkins? O Lord! But I won't have Alice worried on any account, so if this young person doesn't turn out trumps she'll have to go."

"O! Alice seems more than satisfied for so short an acquaintance. However, she will doubtless tell you all about it after dinner."

"Yes! yes! Alice will be the best judge of what she wants," he replied hastily, as he turned his attention to the meal before him. As it drew to a close, and his sister rose to leave the dining-room, a strain of music entered through the door which opened for her egress.

"There!" she exclaimed, stopping short, "*that* is the sort of thing, I suppose, we may expect to have to endure at any time, whether we desire it or not!"

"She sings well," remarked Sir Alan, lifting his head to listen.

"*Sings well!*" retorted Miss Chichester angrily, "so does a canary or a lark, but we don't want our ears split, all the same. So loud too. You might hear it all over the house. I consider it great impudence in a stranger."

"Alice has probably asked the young lady to sing. Are you going in there?"

"Certainly *not!* I hate all sorts of music, as you *know* well. I shall go up to my own apartment until bed time. If you want me, you will know where to find me," replied his sister as she bounced out of the room.

"It was certainly time poor Alice had a companion of some sort," mused Sir Alan sitting alone, "for Anna is a most unsociable person. I hope it will turn out well. Whatever the girl may be like, she has certainly a magnificent voice."

He lingered a little in his passage to the drawing-room listening to it. Miss Murray was singing a German love song, one at which poor Lady Chichester had been used to make a feeble attempt in

the time gone by ; but Sir Alan, in the memories it brought with it, forgot the unworthiness of the interpretation, and thought only of how happy and hopeful he had been in the days when he had last heard it sung. He was passionately fond of music and so was his wife, though neither of them were musicians (artistically speaking), and a very softened feeling came over him as he stood outside the drawing-room and listened to the dulcet German air. It brought back Alice in her prime to him—Alice, with soft, fair hair and tender eyes—and when at last he entered the room, it came almost like a shock to him to see his wife standing there, with every appearance of youth vanished for ever. His entrance caused a little commotion. Lady Chichester gave an exclamation, and the young lady at the grand piano jumped up and stood in a respectful attitude of expectation.

"Don't let me disturb you," were his first words.

"O Alan ! I am so glad you have come," cried his wife, "you will be charmed with Miss Murray's singing. And she is so clever too ! She never saw any of those songs before, and yet she can sing them straight off. They are *my* old songs, you know. Miss Murray has not unpacked her own music yet."

"I recognized the last one, Alice, as having been one of yours. But you have not yet introduced me to this young lady."

"How silly of me ! I was forgetting you have not met. Miss Murray, this is my husband, Sir Alan Chichester. I am sure he will delight in your music,"

"It will be at Sir Alan's service," replied Miss Murray, deferentially, but as she bowed to her new

employer she looked him full in the face with her speaking eyes. Sir Alan was certainly surprised, and somewhat startled. The first impression made upon him by Miss Murray was not that she was the handsomest woman he had ever seen, but certainly the most remarkable. He had not enjoyed a large experience of women, for he hated London, and seldom left Glebe Royal, except when obliged to do so. His circle of acquaintance, therefore, had been narrowed (like that of his sister), and the ladies of the county families who visited his wife had never appeared either entertaining or interesting in his eyes. Indeed, for a man of his age, he was singularly innocent of the wish or intention of wrong-doing; and disappointing as his married life had proved, he had never dreamed of letting his thoughts stray from their legal resting-place. He was all the more likely therefore to prove a deserter, when a stray temptation was placed in his way, because he was so ignorant that he ran any risk in encountering it.

The new-comer struck him as remarkable at first sight, because she formed so great a contrast to what his eyes had been accustomed to see. Clad in a perfectly plain and perfectly fitting cloth dress, which showed every line of a figure replete with grace—with her abundance of dark hair piled upon her head, and a kind of subdued passion smouldering in her eyes and playing about the curves of her mouth, Miss Charlotte Murray (without being a beautiful woman in the strict sense of the word) doubtless formed a very beautiful picture. It has been too often proved to need repetition, that it is

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not the most faultless beauty that takes the strongest hold upon the other sex. Regular features are too apt to lack expression, and where is the charm of an eye that cannot speak, and a mouth that cannot look unutterable things, as the soul within plays upon them in dumb show? Sir Alan felt his blood stirred in an unaccountable manner, as he encountered Miss Murray's gaze, and was angry with himself the next minute for the sensation, for, after all, what had the poor girl done to provoke it?

"There is nothing I enjoy more," he answered, referring to the music, "but don't let me interrupt you; pray proceed."

"I think her ladyship must have had enough for this evening," said Miss Murray discreetly, moving away from the piano; "another time, perhaps."

"O no! no!" cried Lady Chichester, eagerly. "Do sing again. I want Sir Alan to hear you. He will enjoy it as much as I do. Please sing the 'Lieder' once more."

The young lady complied, her rich contralto voice throwing all the force and expression of which it was capable into the impassioned German love song, and dying away on the last plaintive notes, until one might have heard a pin drop amidst the sweet, faint tones.

Meanwhile Lady Chichester, who had induced her husband to occupy the seat next her on the sofa, and had got fast hold of his hand between her own, kept on murmuring in his ear,—

"Isn't it lovely? Isn't she clever? O Alan! I am so glad she has come. I am sure she will be a comfort to me."

And he continued to answer at random, "Yes, dear! Yes, dear!" whilst his whole soul was being drawn out of itself, and absorbed by the glorious tones that filled the apartment. When the song was concluded for the second time, Miss Murray quickly closed the instrument, and asked Lady Chichester's leave to withdraw.

"If your ladyship can spare me," she said deferentially, "and since Sir Alan is here I should like to unpack some of my things for the night."

"But shall I not see you again?" asked Lady Chichester in a pleading voice.

"Certainly, if your ladyship wishes it," returned Miss Murray smiling. "You have but to send for me, you know. Perhaps you would like me to attend you to bed. What time do you retire?"

"About nine as a rule, and I should like to see you then very much, Miss Murray. I seldom go to sleep at once, and old Jane worries me with her silly chatter."

"I will read you to sleep, if you will let me try," said her companion, briskly.

"O! that would be charming, if it won't fatigue you too much."

"You need not be afraid of that. I don't know the meaning of the word. And now, I will leave you for a little."

"But, Miss Murray—one moment! Do you prefer to be addressed formally, or may I call you by your Christian name?"

"I should feel honored by your ladyship using it. But please don't call me 'Charlotte.' I dislike the name, and I am never called by it."

"What, then?"

"'Cora,' if you don't mind. It is only a shortening of the other, and I am afraid I should not answer readily to anything else."

"O, I think it is lovely, and I like it exceedingly. Good-bye, then, Cora, for a little while, and Jane shall let you know when I am ready to retire." On this, the young lady bowed respectfully to them both, and left the apartment.

As soon as she was out of sight, Lady Chichester turned to her husband.

"O Alan! What do you think of her? Isn't she charming? I feel that I can never thank Dr. Jolliffe enough for sending her here. She has quite brightened me up. I ate a better dinner than I have done for weeks."

The baronet's acquiescence was given with discretion.

"Yes, she seems a suitable young person, and I hope she may prove of use to you, but, Alice, don't make too much of her. Remember, she is, after all, but a kind of upper servant, and keep her in her proper place."

"O Alan! she is a perfect lady! You can surely see that."

"That may be, but even ladies sometimes encroach upon kindness. You must take care to maintain your dignity. But she certainly has a most beautiful voice."

"She has indeed, and do you know, dear, I have been thinking already, how nice it would be if you would let her play your accompaniments and get up some of your old songs again."

Sir Alan laughed.

"My dear Alice, my voice must be like a cracked tin kettle by this time. It is years since you ever touched the piano for my benefit, and I have forgotten the little I ever knew. I wonder if that girl has ever been on horseback. She has a magnificent figure for the saddle."

"Hardly likely, dear, I should think, in her position. She must be very poor, I am afraid, to do all she is going to do for me for a hundred a year."

"Nonsense! It's a very good salary for a young woman like that, and look at all the advantages she gains with it. Where are you putting her to sleep?"

"In the room next mine. I gave her the choice between that and the one above, but she says she would rather be near me in case I should want her in the night."

Sir Alan sighed. He had been banished to an upper chamber for a long time past, because his vigorous breathing disturbed the precarious slumber of his wife.

"Have you had one of those horrid fainting fits to-day, Alice?"

"Not a regular one, dear Alan. Only a slight attack on rising this morning. O dear, how I wish that I were strong!"

"Well, let us hope that this young lady may help you to become so. Are you going to try and drive to-morrow?"

"Indeed, I am! Miss Murray says that she will wrap me up so warmly that I shall not feel the cold at all. I think I shall call her 'Cora,' Alan. She is so much younger than I am."

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"Call her anything you like, my dear, so long as she continues to treat you with proper respect."

And so they talked over the merits of the newcomer, until Lady Chichester felt weary and went to bed, and Sir Alan sought refuge in his smoking-room.

CHAPTER VI.

OPPOSITION IN THE HOUSEHOLD.

THE first unpleasantness which Lady Chichester encountered because of Miss Cora Murray came through her old servant, Jane Wood. This woman, now sixty years of age, had been her nurse when she was a child, and had followed her to her husband's home when she became a wife. Like many of the humbler class, when they take a real attachment, their feelings were very strong, and usually evinced themselves by an intense jealousy of every one who approached her mistress. She still looked upon Lady Chichester as the delicate child whom she had nursed through so many illnesses, and she scolded her just the same as she had done then, if she took any liberties with her weakly constitution. On the evening of Miss Murray's arrival old Jane descended to the drawing-room exactly at nine o'clock to attend her mistress to her bedroom, and, when they reached it, she commenced to undress her, for she had never allowed any lady's maid to usurp her privileges. Her ladyship's private attendant might look after her wardrobe, and wait upon her room, but old Jane was the only person admitted to the sanctities of the toilet.

"Your ladyship looks over-tired to me to-night," she remarked, sourly, as she removed the different

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articles of clothing. "Your face is quite flushed. I expect you've been sitting up too much."

"O! no, indeed, Jane," exclaimed Lady Chichester, as though anxious to disarm her wrath. "I have hardly sat up at all. I have been lying down ever since Miss Murray left me. What is Miss Murray doing? Have you seen her, Jane?"

"*Seen her,*" echoed the servant, "what should I want to see her for? She ain't come here to be looked at, has she? Though I don't know what else she was wanted for! There are more than enough of us to wait on your ladyship, and this young person is like the fifth wheel of a coach, to my mind."

"But Miss Murray has come to be my *companion*, Jane—not to wait on me," said Lady Chichester, timidly.

"*Companion!*" sneered the old woman, "as if she was fit to be the companion of such as *you*—a baronet's lady, and the daughter of one of the oldest squires in the county!"

"But you don't understand, nurse! Miss Murray is a lady, the same as I am, and will drive, and walk, and talk with me. I want someone to do that, you know. Miss Chichester is so fond of sitting by herself."

"You should have had a family of strapping boys and girls," grumbled the old woman, "and then you wouldn't have been dependant on anyone for company."

"Ah nurse! what is the use of talking about it? It is God's will."

"Rubbish! You'd have had 'em fast enough, if

you'd have taken my advice from the first, and looked after yourself a little better."

(For it was one of Jane Wood's fixed ideas, that the lack of an heir to Glebe Royal was entirely due to the fact of her not having been consulted in the matter.)

"Don't speak of it any more, nurse," replied her mistress with a sigh, "and please ring the bell."

"What for?"

"I promised to let Miss Murray know when I was ready to go to bed. She is going to read me to sleep."

The servant's jealousy took fire at once.

"You're going to have that young woman in here at this time of night to keep you awake till all hours with her gossiping? Well, then, I won't allow it! I know your constitution, my lady, better than anyone else in the world—not barring your own father and mother—and I won't stand by and see it ruined by a stranger. There's no companions comes into this room of nights, whatever mischief they may do by day. It's past nine, and time you was in bed. So just you get into it, my lady, and go to sleep as fast as you can."

"But you know, Jane, that I never *can* sleep," expostulated Lady Chichester plaintively. "Sometimes I lay awake till it is quite light."

"Well! you'd better lay awake in peace and quietness, than with a lot of nonsense dinning in your ears. Besides the young woman is most likely asleep by this time. They're all selfish at that age. It's only an old friend like me as would sit up waking till all hours to do a good turn for your ladyship."

"Perhaps you're right, Jane," replied her mistress, as she lay down submissively, "and besides the poor girl will be tired after her journey and want a good night's rest. I should have thought of it before." And she closed her eyes patiently, and tried to fancy she was drowsy.

But old Jane was still moving about the room, and putting away her things in the wardrobe, when there came a light tap upon the door. The servant (suspecting who it was that asked for admittance) unclosed it about half an inch, and informed Miss Murray, in an acrid tone, that her ladyship was already in bed, and she couldn't come in.

"But that is the very reason I am here," replied the companion, coolly, as quietly but effectually she put the woman to one side, and walked into the middle of the room. She had exchanged her travelling dress for a loose wrapper, and held a small volume in her hand.

"I have been expecting a summons for the last half hour, Lady Chichester," she said pleasantly. "Have you forgotten that we agreed to try if *my* doctor could not lull you to sleep?" holding up the book she carried.

"O! no," exclaimed Lady Chichester, brightening with pleasure. "I had not forgotten it, indeed, but Jane thought you must be very tired, and were likely to have gone to bed, and so I didn't like to disturb you."

"You mustn't attend to Jane next time," replied Miss Murray, with an effrontery that made the old servant's few remaining hairs stand on end. "I am

here by the doctor's orders, remember, expressly to minister to your ladyship's need, and I will not forego my duties for anyone. And now, you must let me put out these lights. One candle behind the bed curtain is that I shall require, and more will hurt your eyes."

"How thoughtful you are!" murmured Lady Chichester, "you think of everything."

"Has your ladyship all you require for the night? I would rather your maid left the room before I commenced reading," continued Miss Murray.

"O! I'll go, Miss, sharp enough! You needn't be afraid of that," snarled Jane Wood. "I've nursed and attended on her ladyship since she was a baby, but, of course, I have to give way to any stranger, if it's by the *doctor's* orders, so I wish you both good-night." And grumbling at the innovation, she took her way down the stairs.

"Slightly jealous," remarked Cora Murray, with a laugh as she disappeared. "These old servants are terrible tyrants sometimes. But if your ladyship is ready I will begin. I mustn't talk you awake again."

She settled herself with her back to her employer and commenced in a low rich voice, that was replete with feeling, to read (or almost recite) from Tennyson's "Idylls of the King." There are some good singing voices that are not melodious in speaking, and some natures full of emotion, who have no capability of reproducing it in oratory. But Cora Murray could. She was a singularly gifted woman, and she knew her power, and where she could exercise it. She read steadily on for about fifteen minutes, but then,

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stealing a sly glance at her patient, found her wide awake, and with dilated eyes in which the tears were standing, following the pathetic story with sympathetic eagerness.

"O! this will never do," said Miss Murray rising. "Tennyson is keeping you awake instead of doing the other thing! I think I must try the effect of one of Gladstone's speeches instead."

"It is so beautiful," sighed Lady Chichester, "and you have a way of reading that makes it all seem real! But go on, for I am really enjoying it."

"I think I had better not, Lady Chichester, for excitement may have the worst possible effect on you. I did not know you felt poetry so strongly, or I would not have advised it as an evening dose. We must try it in the forenoon instead. Will you let me see if I can magnetize you to sleep?"

"What is that?"

"Nothing very formidable! Only to lay my hands upon your forehead in order to induce slumber. It does not answer with *all* people, but I have been very successful with my friends. Lying awake at night is simply a habit. The nerves require soothing. Yet it is a very difficult habit to overcome. But once mastered it does not often return."

As she continued talking in this indifferent strain upon subjects of no great interest, Miss Murray kept passing her fingers lightly over Lady Chichester's forehead, and in a few minutes she had the satisfaction of seeing her eyes close, and after dreamily re-opening them two or three times, and murmuring some indistinguishable words, Lady Chichester sank back on her pillows in a deep, mesmeric sleep.

"I thought she would be a good subject directly I saw her," mused Miss Murray, as she watched her ladyship's slumber for a few minutes, "and she is about the easiest I ever tried. Plastic as wax I should imagine, asleep or awake! Poor woman! what an existence to lead! And poor husband too, to be tied to her! I am sure from Dr. Jolliffe's manner that he thinks there is something very serious th. matter. Well, if all turns out as it promises to do, it will be decidedly my interest to keep her alive, and my own fault if I am not comfortable whilst I am here."

She made a few more passes over the sleeping lady's forehead, as if to make sure she would not wake again, and then she extinguished the light and stole softly from the room. And when she reached her own apartment, she sat down by the fire, and, drawing a small table in front of her, commenced to write the following letter:

"GLEBE ROYAL, October 10th.

"DEAR JOHN,

"I have arrived safely, and the old party did not exaggerate matters. Everything about the place is as nice as can be; a little countrified perhaps, but peace and plenty reigning notwithstanding. Lady C. is an amiable nonentity, and Sir A. good-looking but bucolic. The only unpleasant member of the family is Miss C., a horrid old maid who looked daggers at me, but I shall win her round if I can. A pint of oil is worth a gallon of vinegar, as I am always trying to impress upon you. I magnetized Lady C. to sleep this evening; I am afraid I should have a hard task to magnetize the old maid—cats have never been amenable to magnetic influence—but I think the baronet would fall an easy prey; doubtless, however, he sleeps well enough without it. Altogether, I like the place

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and the people, but remember that I don't stay in it a day longer than I choose. You must understand that plainly. I am not a child to be coerced against my will. It was my pleasure to come here, and it may be my pleasure to leave, as it was some time ago when I was so bothered about F. And wherever you may be, whether in New Zealand or the Brazils, I claim my right to be with you if it suits my purpose. But for awhile (and since I don't particularly care about sea voyages nor any other risks) I am contented enough. If you *can* see me before you start, do so, and if it is impossible, let me have full notice of your departure. I might get leave to run up to town for a day.

"Yours affectionately,

"LOTTA.

"P.S.—By the way, when you write, don't put my own name on the address, as I have told them to call me 'Cora.'"

When she had finished this epistle, she put it in an envelope, addressed to

Mr. T. MASHAM,

"Three Pigeons" Hotel,

Birkenhead,

and carefully locked it up in her blotting case before she went to bed. The next morning found her bright, glowing and vivacious. She was more of a daylight than a candlelight beauty, and her wonderful vitality always made her look as fresh as a rose. Her first inquiry of the housemaid who brought her hot water was for Lady Chichester.

"Have you heard what sort of a night her ladyship has passed, Ruth?"

"No, Miss! Old Mrs. Wood is that jealous of her ladyship, she won't let any one of us pass over the threshold of her door."

"Ah! old Mrs. Wood must be disposed of," thought Miss Murray with an inward smile; "her ladyship shall see the old nuisance in her true colors before she is many weeks older." But she didn't say anything more to the housemaid. She was too clever to show her hand before a servant.

As she was descending the staircase at the summons of the breakfast bell, she was met half-way by the same domestic.

"Your breakfast is laid in here, please, Miss!" she said, intimating a small room on the landing. Miss Murray entered and found a fire but just lighted, and a very simple meal laid for one upon the table.

"It is by Miss Chichester's orders, Miss," said the maid apologetically, "and she only gave them to me ten minutes ago. If I'd known it last night, the fire should have been lighted earlier, and I could have asked you what you'd like to take. Miss Chichester said as an egg and a cup of tea would be sufficient, but if you'd like a slice of ham, Miss, or buttered toast or anything, I'm sure cook would send it up directly."

"No, thank you, Ruth! It will do very well," replied Miss Murray, quietly, as she took her seat at the table.

She didn't intend that state of things to continue, but she knew better than to appear dissatisfied on the very first morning of her residence in Glebe Royal. So she commenced to pour out her tea and demolish her egg, as if she had never expected to see a more luxurious meal,

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CHAPTER VII.

MAGNETIZING THE MASTER.

SIR ALAN entered the breakfast room rather more briskly than usual that morning, for it was not a hunting day, and, as a rule, he considered his hunting days the only ones worth living. He glanced at the table as he passed the threshold, and, seeing only his sister seated in state behind the tea-urn, he exclaimed :

" Hullo! I'm not the only late bird this morning, I see."

" I don't understand you, Alan," replied Miss Chichester, presenting her ear for the fraternal salute. " I was down punctually at nine o'clock."

" I mean Miss What's-her-name!—Miss Murray! She will surely not wait till Alice has her breakfast! The poor girl will be starved."

" *Miss Murray!*" repeated his sister frigidly—" did you expect to see her? She breakfasts in her own room."

" What room?"

" The one on the stairs. I ordered Ruth to lay her meals there."

" What! in that dismal little hole! Surely she would rather take them with us."

" I don't know what Miss Murray would *prefer*, but I know what is suitable to her position. She can

never have expected to be admitted to the family circle."

"And why not? If she is good enough to be Alice's companion, surely she is good enough to be ours. I never heard of such an indignity. It is a positive insult."

"You are very quick to take up arms in this young person's defence. I thought you were altogether opposed to her presence in Glebe Royal."

"So I was—quite as much as yourself—but since Jo.liffe considers her presence necessary to Alice's well-doing, I will not have it turned into a torture. The girl's a lady, and she shall not be treated like a servant."

"I shall never treat her as anything else," said Miss Chichester, tossing her head.

"Excuse me, Anna, but you will do as you are told. *You* are not the mistress of Glebe Royal, remember, and in this instance you must follow the cue that Alice gives you."

"I have lived under this roof, the roof which sheltered my dear parents for fifty years," exclaimed Miss Chichester, "and you have never spoken to me in such a strain before, Alan."

"There may not have been an occasion for it," returned her brother. "And now, will you go and ask Miss Murray to join us at the breakfast table, or shall we send Humphreys with the message?"

"I shall not go," said Miss Chichester.

"Very well. Then I will go myself," replied Sir Alan as he left the room again. Miss Chichester sat behind her tea-urn, paralyzed with indignation.

"Baby" Alan had given her a "bit of his mind" on several occasions before, but she had never seen him so determined in the cause of a perfect stranger, especially one whose advent he had so strongly deprecated. Meanwhile the baronet had walked upstairs to the little room on the landing and knocked at the door.

"Good-morning, Miss Murray," he said on entering. "I have come to ask you if you will join Miss Chichester and myself at the breakfast table. There has been some stupid mistake about your breakfast being laid up here. My sister fancied you would prefer a room to yourself, but I don't think you look so unsociable as all that. What do you say?"

"That I am quite of your opinion, Sir Alan," replied Cora Murray, laughing. "I am not at all unsociable. I am a gregarious animal, especially at feeding time, and when Lady Chichester does not require my attendance, I would greatly prefer taking my meals downstairs."

"Then come along at once," he said gaily, "for I have not commenced my breakfast yet, and it will be quite a pleasure to see your bright face at the table."

In another minute (to Miss Chichester's disgust) the two had entered the breakfast room together. She saluted Miss Murray with a cold and rather discourteous bow on meeting, and then, having asked if she would take tea or coffee, she relapsed into silence, and left her brother and the "companion" to do all the talking by themselves. And the worst of it was, that they did not seem to notice that she took no part in the conversation, but chattered on

every subject that rose to the surface. Sir Alan was a great talker when he found anyone sympathetic enough to talk to, but his sister's stoney indifference and his wife's easily provoked fatigue had somewhat quelled his powers of late years. Miss Murray, having gauged the temperaments of her employers, cast off the reticence she had assumed on first arrival, and now proved herself able to talk freely, yet modestly, on a variety of subjects, amongst which, to Sir Alan's surprise, she touched on hunting, as if quite conversant with the sport.

"You are fond of horses?" he inquired.

"Who is not, Sir Alan, who is worth anything?"

"And you can ride?"

"Yes!"

"And have you ever hunted?"

"Often!"

"O! this *is* a surprise," exclaimed the baronet, at home at once on his favorite topic; "tell me where and when?"

"Ah, Sir Alan, you touch an old wound when you ask me *that*," replied Miss Murray, with clouded eyes. "Don't forget how circumstances have altered with me. They were times that will never return, and the less I think of them the better."

"You must pardon me if I hurt you," he said apologetically, "but if you are fond of riding, I'll give you a mount any day. I have a lovely little cob in my stables, just up to your weight, which must be about—let me see"—he added musing, as he scanned her rounded figure.

"Ten stone to an ounce," she replied smiling, "but

with due thanks, Sir Alan, you mustn't talk to me about riding; it is quite out of the question. I haven't even a habit now."

"O! that can soon be remedied," he returned confidently. "Lady Chichester must have two or three in her wardrobe."

"Which reminds me that I am here to attend upon Lady Chichester, and not to ride to meets," with a modesty which she knew would further her cause with both her hearers, "and so please let us talk no more about it."

"But I don't see why it shouldn't be managed as nicely as possible," he continued pertinaciously; "the little cob would be just the thing for you. My friend, Captain Fauntleroy, generally rides it when he is here, but he has just left us, worse luck! and we're not likely to see him again for some time."

Miss Murray made no comment on this piece of news; indeed she was at the moment looking for something under the table, so it is quite doubtful whether she even heard it.

"Let me help you," said the baronet gallantly; "have you dropped anything?"

"Only my serviette. Pray don't trouble yourself, I have already found it," and she raised her face again, which had become rather red from the exertion of stooping.

"Have you seen Lady Chichester this morning?" inquired Miss Chichester, breaking the ice for the first time.

"Not yet," replied Miss Murray. "I have inquired for her, of course, but have received no summons to

go to her room. I did not leave her until she was fast asleep last night."

"Indeed!" remarked Miss Chichester incredulously; "that's strange, for my sister-in-law generally lies awake for hours after retiring."

"What charm did you use?" said Sir Alan.

"None, Sir Alan, except an attempt to sooth her nerves, which are in a very irritable condition. But I am usually very successful in calming nervous patients. The doctors say I inspire my own vitality into them."

"You appear to have any amount to spare," said the baronet.

"Yes. I am very strong."

"You are the embodiment of life," he continued admiringly, as they rose from the table. Then he stretched himself before the fire, after the manner of Englishmen, and said,

"I am going my morning round of the stables, Miss Murray. Will you come with me, and have a look at the little cob?"

"O no, thank you, Sir Alan. It is quite impossible. Her ladyship might want me at any moment."

"We can leave word for a messenger to be sent after you."

"No, thank you," she repeated with dignity; "it is out of the question."

And then he left the room and they saw him no more. Miss Chichester locked the tea chest with a snap, and, pocketing the keys, was about to follow her brother.

"Do you think?" inquired the "companion" in a

meek voice, "that I might venture to go to her ladyship's room now?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," replied the other grumpily. "I am not even acquainted with the duties of a companion. It's the first time there's been one within the walls of Glebe Royal."

"Well, they don't consist of going to the stables to see Captain—Captain—What was the name of the gentleman Sir Alan alluded to?"

"Captain Henry Fauntleroy, I suppose you mean."

"Ah! Captain Henry Fauntleroy's cob, I'm sure of that," returned Miss Murray steadily. "Fauntleroy is a pretty name. I think it belongs to a Norfolk family."

"I can't inform you, and, as I have my housekeeping duties to attend to, I must bid you good-morning," said Miss Chichester, sailing from the room.

"Yes, the old cat will certainly take a lot of magnetizing," thought Miss Murray as she gazed after her, "and I very much doubt if I ever succeed in doing it, for the antagonistic fluid is very strong. *N'importe!* She's not the first woman in the world that has hated me, and yet somehow—I live. So I dare say I shall survive all her clumsy sarcasm."

Then her face softened a little as she turned it towards the window, and looked out upon the glories of the park.

"And so they know Fauntleroy, and there is a chance of his coming here at any time. I must watch his movements like a lynx. Poor Fauntleroy! I feel as if I *could* not even meet him, for his sake as well as my own. He has never reproached me, but

he is the only man who has ever made me reproach myself. If ever I hear of his proximity I will run ten miles the other way, and yet I think he cares for me too much to betray me."

She turned and walked slowly into the hall, where she encountered Sir Alan, rather excited, with a bunch of autumn violets in his hand.

"Are you fond of violets, Miss Murray?" he exclaimed; "some ladies like to wear them in front of their dress, and these are very sweet. My lodge-keeper's little girl gathered them for me, so I thought I would bring them in to you whilst they were fresh."

"They are my favorite flowers," she replied as she took them from him. "Thank you so much, Sir Alan. But I shall not keep them for myself; I will take them at once to Lady Chichester." And she ran lightly upstairs as she spoke.

"The good baronet appears to be a little magnetized as well as his wife," was the thought in her mind as she left him, but she appeared as simple as a girl as she entered Lady Chichester's room.

"How has your ladyship rested?" she inquired deferentially as she approached her chair.

"Wonderfully well, Cora. Better than I have done for weeks past, and I feel so refreshed this morning. What lovely violets!"

"Are they not beautiful? Their perfume fills the room, and Sir Alan sent them to your ladyship, and wishes to know when the carriage is to be ready to take you out."

"The carriage!" echoed Lady Chichester with a shiver. "Surely it is too cold to drive this morning."

"Not at all. It is only fresh, and will do you all the good in the world. Now, dear Lady Chichester, remember what the doctor said, how imperatively necessary it is for your health that you should go out every day."

"I've known her ladyship's constitution since she was a baby," grumbled Jane Wood, "and I never knew her take any good from exposing her delicate chest to a north wind. It's as likely to be her death as not."

"Well, if you think you know better than Dr. Jolliffe, will you tell him so next time he comes, and request him to give his orders to you instead of to me," retorted Miss Murray, with a determination that made the old woman wince, and be silent.

"If you are *sure* it will do me good," commenced Lady Chichester feebly.

"I am *quite* sure of it. I have been out on the terrace without my hat, and it is quite mild. Let us drive in the close carriage, if you like it better, and take Tennyson with us, and then, if you feel it too cold, we will close the windows, and I will read to you instead."

"O ! I shall like *that* !" said Lady Chichester with alacrity, and half an hour afterwards, the baronet, plodding through the stubble, looking after his coveys of young birds, was startled by the sound of wheels, and glancing up, saw his wife, wrapped in furs, driving in an open carriage, with her companion by her side, and both women smiling and nodding to him as they passed.

"That girl is certainly working a revolution in the

household," he thought as they went by. "To imagine Alice out in the open air by noon! It is incredible! I suppose Jolliffe was right, and all she needed was the incentive. Ah!" he ended with a sigh, "if she had only half the spirit and vitality of her companion."

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CHAPTER VIII.

SIR ALAN HAS SINGING LESSONS.

DR. JOLLIFFE discreetly kept aloof from Glebe Royal for a week, in order to allow the new-comer to settle down to her duties; but when, at the expiration of that period, he looked in to see how his new plan had succeeded, he was satisfied beyond all his expectations. He found Lady Chichester with a smile in her eye and a tinge of color in her cheek, quite eager to tell him where she had been, and what she had seen during the last few days, and how good Miss Murray had been in amusing and distracting her.

"Come! come!" cried the doctor, "here's a vast improvement already. Your ladyship's pulse is more regular and stronger, and the action of the heart is increased. How many fainting fits have you experienced since I saw you last?"

"Only two, doctor, and during the last one I never lost consciousness. Cora thinks I was laced rather too tight. I feel much easier now."

"And how is your appetite?"

"Really better, though you know it is bad at the best of times. But Cora thinks of such dainty little dishes for me, and has them prepared at such unexpected moments, that I can't help eating. And she always brings me a glass of wine and a sandwich before I go out driving, and it seems to keep me up."

"She knows what is good for you! And how about the sleepless nights?"

"Ah! Dr. Jolliffe, I am afraid you will laugh, but I really think Cora has nearly cured them too. She has such a soothing way with her, and she won't allow me to sit up until I am over-tired, and then she makes me take another glass of wine and a biscuit, and reads by my bedside till I am quite drowsy. And I dare say the fresh air I have taken has had a good effect on me too, but I don't lie awake nearly so long as I used to do."

"Then the advent of this young lady has really turned out a success, Lady Chichester?"

"*A success, doctor!* Why! I don't know what I should do without her even now. I never had anyone to look after me as she does. She is so clever, and so thoughtful, and so amusing. She sings and plays beautifully, and Sir Alan has begun to spend his evenings in the drawing-room again now, which is such a pleasure to me. And you can't think how accomplished Cora is too. She can ride on horseback, and skate, and dance, and do everything. Sir Alan wants her to ride with him sometimes, but she won't leave me."

"Of course not! I should be very much surprised if she did. Her object in coming here was to wait upon you. But I should like to see this female Admiral Crichton! Where is she?"

"I think she must have run away in order that we might have our talk alone. Please ring the bell, doctor, and John will ask her to come down again."

In a few minutes Cora Murray, looking very handsome and sparkling, entered the room.

"Well! young lady," said the doctor, shaking hands with her, "I must congratulate you on the change your presence has effected here! My patient is decidedly better, and she says she owes it all to you. I think that is something to be proud of."

"I *should* be proud of it, sir, were I not afraid that her ladyship flatters me. She is too good. She has interested herself so much on my behalf that it has benefited her own health. But I am very glad you think her better."

Lady Chichester had got hold of Miss Murray's hand, and was looking up affectionately into her face as she spoke.

"Dr. Jolliffe sees a vast improvement in me, Cora, and I have been telling him that you must think of yourself, as well as of me, and take some rides on horseback with Sir Alan. You have been used to much more exercise than you get here, I am sure."

"Is that the case?" asked the doctor, regarding her steadily in the face.

"I can't say that it is *not*, but there is no necessity for my riding on horseback. Walking exercise serves the purpose just as well, and I have always time for that before her ladyship rises. When the warm weather sets in I shall be out at six o'clock in the morning."

"Ah! that's the way to keep in robust health! But if you have been used to a great deal of open air exercise, Miss Murray, you cannot neglect the practice now, or you may suffer from sitting up at night."

"Now that is just what I said," exclaimed Lady Chichester, "and so I shall get that habit altered

to fit you at once, Cora, and I shall *insist* on your going out riding with Sir Alan. I should be quite miserable if your health suffered from waiting upon me."

"*That* will never do me any harm, Lady Chichester," replied her companion.

"Well! well! Take care of yourselves and take care of each other," said the doctor as he rose to go. "Miss Murray, I should like to try a new medicine with her ladyship. If you will accompany me to the library, I will write the prescription, and give you directions for its being taken."

As he sat at the library writing-table, and glanced up at the beaming eyes and dark brows that gazed at him from the other side, Dr. Jolliffe thought suddenly how much too handsome Cora Murray was for a companion. But she was very pleasant to look at, all the same, and as his eyes met hers, they told her so.

"Dr. Jolliffe," she said, bending towards him, "as you have placed me (as it were) in charge of Lady Chichester's health, I think you ought to let me know what is the matter with her."

"She is simply a great invalid."

"She is more than that, sir! She has a complication of symptoms that puzzle me. How can I guard against danger if I don't know from which quarter it may arise?"

"You're a very sensible young woman," said Dr. Jolliffe, "and I think you're quite fit to be trusted with a secret. I am not quite sure what is the matter with her ladyship myself."

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"But you must have formed a conjecture on the subject. Are her lungs affected?"

"No."

"And her heart?"

"Yes, the action of the heart is very weak, and the whole vitality at a low ebb."

"You detect no organic disease?"

"None that I can certainly pronounce upon. Her symptoms puzzle me more than they do you. Either she is the victim of an internal disease, or—well! I will say no more at present. You must be content with that."

"Do you think she will *live*?" asked Miss Murray, seriously.

"I will not say *what* I think, except that she is in a very precarious condition, and requires the utmost care. What she most needs is strength to go through whatever may be before her. Improve her appetite, give her plenty of fresh air and induce sleep, and she may live for years. But you have begun well, Miss Murray, and you have only to go on as you have begun."

"You may be sure I will do *that*," she replied, as she took charge of the prescription he had written.

When dinner was over that evening, and Sir Alan made his appearance in the drawing-room, his wife attacked him on the subject of Cora's riding on horseback.

"Dr. Jolliffe says she must *not* neglect taking her usual exercise, Alan, and she has been used to much more than she gets here, and he says she will be ill if she stays in the house, and so *do* persuade her to

ride for an hour or so every day. She could do it before I get up."

"I have already told Miss Murray that my stables and my services are at her disposal. 'Cock Robin' will carry her beautifully, and your old saddle, Alice, is ready to put on him to-morrow morning, if she wishes it."

"Ah! my old saddle," said Lady Chichester, with a sigh. "How long it is since I have seen it, and how vexed you used to be with me for my bad riding, Alan."

"You were so absurdly timid, my dear, that I was always afraid of your meeting with an accident."

"You were always too good to me, my darling. But Cora will not be timid, I am sure. I think she is as bold as a lion."

"I was put in the saddle almost as soon as I could sit up by myself," replied Miss Murray, smiling, "so there is nothing wonderful in my having overcome all fear! But may I ask if that is a roll of new music in your hand, Sir Alan?"

"Not exactly," replied the baronet, blushing and stammering in an unusual manner; "the fact is—that is, Lady Chichester wished to hear me sing, and so I brought some of my songs, to see if I can persuade you to play the accompaniments for me."

"Of course I will!" replied Cora Murray, whilst his wife exclaimed, "O! how good of you, dear Alan! I am sure Cora will be delighted with your singing! You can have no idea," she continued to her companion, "what a beautiful voice he has."

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for many years, my voice must be as rusty as that of an old crow. I am more than half afraid to open my mouth before Miss Murray."

"O! I know what it is to be out of practice too, Sir Alan, and can quite sympathize with you," said Cora, "but, after singing a few songs, you will soon find yourself in voice again. What is your voice, baritone or tenor?"

"Baritone, I believe—such as it is!"

"Such a useful voice for amateurs," she said, softly, "you can do anything with it. Which of these songs shall I try over for you?"

He chose some simple ballad, and the practicing began. Sir Alan Chichester's singing proved to be like that of many amateurs. Naturally, he had a good organ, but he had never been taught how to use it, and his idea of time was so peculiar as to require a great deal of accommodation on the part of his accompanist.

But Miss Murray smoothed over all the difficulties in a skillful manner, that sent Lady Chichester into raptures over her husband's singing, and made the baronet so pleased with himself that, after his wife had retired to rest under the *chaperonage* of Jane Wood, he inquired if her companion would think him too troublesome if he asked her to play one or two of his songs over again.

"Not at all," she answered. "Indeed, why should you ask the question, Sir Alan? Surely I am here to make myself useful to *you*, if it is possible, as well as to her ladyship."

The baronet was leaning on the side of the grand

piano, and gazing full at her as she spoke. As she sat there in her velveteen dress, which just showed a glimpse of her creamy throat and bosom and the turn of her rounded arm, she was so unlike any specimen of womanhood with which he had ever been brought into intimate contact before, that the sight of her stirred his blood in an almost forgotten manner.

"But I am so afraid of worrying you," he answered. "I sing so badly, but—but—when *you* play the accompaniment, it is such a pleasure to me, all the same."

"And it is a pleasure to me," said Miss Murray, briskly, as she touched the instrument.

Sir Alan stumbled through another love ballad, and then he took to leaning on the piano again, and gazing at his accompanist.

"And you will really consent to ride with me?" he inquired presently.

"I never said so, Sir Alan!"

"But you *will*, I am sure. My wife wishes it, you see, and I am certain you will enjoy it. We live in a beautiful county, and the drives and rides are full of interest. Besides, you must hunt with us. We have one of the finest packs in England, and quite a number of ladies at the meets. I shall mount you on my little hunter 'Ariel' for that."

"You are too good to me," she murmured, though she knew all the time that it was not his goodness, but the glamour of her fatal eyes that had evoked the baronet's offer.

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to yourself. And about such appointments as you may require! Order them, Miss Murray, and we will make it all right on settling day."

"I don't know how to thank you, Sir Alan," she replied in a low voice, "but—I *feel* it!"

Sir Alan was about to reply that *he* too felt it, when their conference was interrupted by the sound of a harsh cough. Miss Chichester, having heard her sister-in-law go to bed, thought it but right that she should come down, and see what was going on in the drawing-room, for she had not overcome her original dislike to Miss Murray in the slightest degree. On the contrary, it seemed to increase as the days went on. On discovering her propinquity, Cora commenced to play one of Mendelssohn's "Songs Without Words," which enabled her to go on talking without being overheard, and exasperated the other beyond all description.

"Lady Chichester has gone up to her own room, Miss Murray!" she said, in a loud voice, as she established herself with her knitting by the fire.

"I know it, thank you! I was here when her ladyship retired," said the companion quickly.

"She may be wanting you!"

"We have agreed that her ladyship is to ring when she is ready for my services."

Miss Chichester snorted.

"I should consider it more becoming if you were to quit the drawing-room at the same time as she does. I dislike music exceedingly. It makes me ill."

"In that case we will close the piano and defer

our practice, Sir Alan, till a more favorable opportunity," replied Miss Murray, as, with a dignified bow, she left the room.

"What do you mean by speaking to her like that?" demanded the baronet angrily, as Cora disappeared.

"What do *you* mean by treating her like a guest, instead of a dependent?" retorted his sister.

"I treat her like a lady, as she behaves, which is more than I can say for yourself," he answered.

"O! of course not! I saw how it would be from the beginning—what with Alice's weakness and your stupidity, you will spoil the girl between you and then she will have to leave. She will get too fine for her work!"

"That is our business, and not yours! But I insist upon your treating her with politeness."

And so Miss Chichester found herself worsted, which only increased her hatred of the new companion.

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CHAPTER IX:

MISS MURRAY IS CALLED AWAY.

WHAT with the united persuasion of Sir Alan and Lady Chichester, it was not many days before Miss Murray was to be seen mounted on "Cock Robin," and the skillful manner in which she handled the spirited little animal so increased the baronet's admiration for her talents, that he became eager to see her in the hunting field. A perfectly fitting habit and hat having arrived mysteriously from London, she appeared at the next meet, riding by the M. F.'s side, and raised a storm of curiosity, malice and envy. No dress—except perhaps a pair of tights—shows off the lines of a woman's figure so well as a riding habit, and Cora Murray's figure was her strongest point. She could not help seeing the looks of admiration directed towards her by the men, and the curious glances with which the women succeeded them. She was in her glory, and the knowledge added an extra sparkle to her flashing eyes. She had been working for this from the beginning. All her little wiles and graces—her apparent reluctance to accept the baronet's offer—her fears lest she should be stepping out of her province by doing so—had been so many artful means to attain an end. And now she had succeeded. She was placed in a position

that must bring her in association with members of the best county families, and there was no knowing *what* it might not lead to. All the sportsmen wanted to ascertain the name of the handsome girl riding by Sir Alan Chichester's side, for it was so rare an occurrence to see the baronet in familiar intercourse with *any* woman, that the fact alone was counted worthy of notice. But Sir Alan did not seem disposed to share the spoil with his fellow men. He stuck like a leech to Cora's side, as long as ever it was possible, ignoring all the hints thrown out for an introduction to her, and only parted from her when (to his dismay) he saw her lissom figure, perched on Ariel, flying over hedges, where his sixteen stone of solid flesh warned him it would be folly to attempt to follow her. Then indeed Sir Alan found himself sighing, and wishing he were twenty years younger, or that he had met such a woman as Cora twenty years before. As she came proudly up to him at the death, to receive the brush from his hands, with her glowing eyes and cheeks, and her frame trembling with the excitement she had gone through, he felt as though he had found a companion to sympathize with his tastes and pursuits for the first time in his life. And as he lifted her from her horse at the door of Glebe Royal, when the day's sport was over, he whispered something of the same sort in her ear, and told her he had never enjoyed a run so much before.

"You're a fool!" said Miss Chichester abruptly to her sister-in-law, a few days later, as they watched

the departure of the baronet and Miss Murray for a second day's sport, "and Alan's another! You're a pair of fools, and I have no patience with you!"

"But *why?*?" exclaimed Lady Chichester, turning her large pathetic eyes upon the speaker. "What have we done Anna, to make you speak so strangely?"

"Why do you let that girl go out hunting, when it is her business to sit at home and sort your wools? You might just as well bring the cook to lie on the sofa in the drawing-room."

"O Anna! How can you make such a comparison? Cora is a lady, any one can see *that*, and if she likes horse exercise why shouldn't she take it?"

"And leave you alone for a whole day to look after yourself? That's not what Jolliffe sent her here for."

"But she has very little amusement, poor girl, and we mustn't forget she is younger than we are. Young people need variety. I was quite glad when she consented to go."

"Humph! *amusement*," snorted Miss Chichester; "it strikes me Miss Murray is a young lady who knows how to amuse herself."

"Well! you wouldn't grudge her doing it, would you, Anna?" said Lady Chichester.

"Ah! it's not *my* business—she's not *my* companion, thank heaven," replied her sister-in-law; "she'd soon see the outside of Glebe Royal if she were. But what are *you* going to do all day without her? Who will drive with you and read to you, and carry your messages to and fro?"

"I don't know," said Lady Chichester, with a

plaintive look. "I shall miss her terribly, but I am so much better now that I must not be selfish and keep her always by my side. Perhaps old Jane will bring her work into the drawing-room, and—and—would you drive out with me, Anna?" she added timidly

"I! No, thank you! I hate driving! The rocking of a carriage reminds me of a boat at sea. I am going for a good ten-mile walk into the country."

"Never mind," returned Lady Chichester, gently, whilst a faint flush mantled in her cheek, "I shall be very well amused with my books until dear Alan and Cora return." And she walked slowly back to the sofa as she spoke.

Miss Chichester regarded her with a look of ill-disguised contempt, and then turned on her heel to seek her own devices, whilst the unselfish little lady resigned herself to a day of solitude, in order to promote the pleasure of the two people she loved best in the world.

When Sir Alan and Cora Murray returned from their sport, she received them with a genuine welcome, and listened with pleasurable excitement to the account of their run.

"And now you must have a cup of tea with me before you change your habit, Cora! John will bring it in a minute. And here is a letter for you, dear, that came by the afternoon post."

Miss Murray tore open the envelope and ran over the contents.

"What a nuisance!" she exclaimed.

"What is it?" asked Lady Chichester.

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awhile, and wishes to see me before his departure. Would your ladyship be able to spare me for a few days, to run up to London?"

"*Spare you*, Cora? O! how can I? What shall I do without you? But still, if it is necessary, I mustn't be too selfish. Is your guardian going away for long?"

"No, only a trip abroad—but he wants to see me before he goes. He is my only relation, you know, and he is foolish enough to be—well"—with an arch glance at the baronet—"rather fond of me."

"But *we* are fond of you too," said Lady Chichester coaxingly.

"I will not go unless you can really spare me," replied Miss Murray, toying with her cup of tea.

"We shall never be able to do that, Miss," interposed Sir Alan, gallantly.

"I would promise to return on the third day," replied Miss Murray.

"Well! I suppose we shall have to make up our minds to it," said her ladyship. "When must it be?"

"O! we will talk of that after dinner," exclaimed her companion, rising. "I have really not half mastered the contents of my guardian's letter."

But as she was on her way upstairs, she felt a hand placed on her arm in the half light, and heard Sir Alan's voice say: "You will *not* go, Cora—will you?" and she answered, "Not if *you* wish it."

She looked handsomer than ever that evening as they sat down to dinner, for Lady Chichester had so far recovered her strength as to be able to sit at the table. Sir Alan and Miss Murray were full of their

day's sport, and the adventures they had met with in the field, and as they laughed over their joint reminiscences, the guardian's request seemed to be entirely forgotten—indeed, Cora joined eagerly in the discussion of plans for the next few days. But before the meal was concluded, the butler brought Sir Alan one of those yellow envelopes that betoken a telegram.

"No bad news, I hope," said Lady Chichester, anxiously—poor woman! the least suspense had the power to make her tremble like an aspen leaf—"the sight of a telegram always makes me so nervous."

"Nonsense! you should fight against it," said Miss Chichester roughly.

"Bad news! Alice?" replied her husband cheerily. "Not at all! The very best of news! Dear old Hal is coming back to us! He has obtained a week's leave before the regiment sails for Gibraltar. Dear old Hal! I wish he would sell out, and settle down altogether at Glebe Royal. I am sure you will get on with him, Miss Murray. He loves all active, outdoor sports, and is as keen after hunting as yourself."

"But who *is* he?" asked Cora, smiling at her host's enthusiasm.

"Why! my greatest chum, Henry Fauntleroy—a captain in the Queen's 99th Tartans. Such a thoroughly good-hearted fellow! Have I not mentioned his name to you before?"

"O! yes! several times! And is he to be here to-morrow?"

"But only for two days—worse luck! He must

spend a little time with his own family. But you will see him long enough to find out how nice he is. He will cut us all out, Miss Murray."

"Do you think so? But I may not be here."

"I thought you had given up the idea of visiting London," said the baronet, with a crestfallen air.

"I am going to talk it over with Lady Chichester after dinner," replied Cora discreetly.

When she began to talk it over, the reasons for her going to London without any delay appeared to increase tenfold. Before, she had been rather irresolute; now, she was quite decided. Her guardian was her uncle and best friend—she owed everything in life to him—and she could not think of allowing him to leave the country without saying farewell. He was in delicate health too, and might never return. In fact, when Lady Chichester attempted to reason her out of the project, Miss Murray declared emphatically that she would rather throw up her situation than be guilty of such a piece of ingratitude. This clinched the matter at once.

"O Cora!" exclaimed her ladyship, "how could you imagine that *we* would be so ungrateful as to place a barrier in the way of your duty! And after all you have done for me, too! I should be making you a bad return. Pray go, dear, as soon as you like, and return when you think fit. I shall be only too glad to see you again, but I will not ask you to come back a single day before your guardian is willing to part with you."

"O! as for that, dear Lady Chichester, he would keep me with him always, if he could, but I have an

independent spirit, and will not eat his bread whilst I can earn my own. Still—he is my father's brother, and I owe him more than I can ever repay ; and so, as you kindly give me leave, I shall go up to town by an early train to-morrow."

When the baronet appeared he tried hard to make Miss Murray alter her decision, or even put off her journey for another day, but she was resolute, and the next morning (to Miss Chichester's intense disgust) he prepared to drive her to the station himself in his dogcart. His sister stood at the window watching their departure, with her long nose high in the air, and as they drove out of the gates Cora remarked to her charioteer, "there's *one* person who would rather see my back than my face."

"Do you mean my sister?"

"I do. Have you not observed her dislike to me? Why, it is evident!"

"I think she is jealous, Cora, as well she may be, of your talents and your beauty. What woman is not jealous of them? You have set Glebe Royal in a flame."

"Except dear Lady Chichester! She is too good to be jealous of anybody!"

"Ah! my poor wife! But she has been used for so long to think of nothing but her own ailments, that she seems to have lost the ordinary instincts of her sex. I am very unfortunately situated, Cora. My wife is nothing but a burden to me. She has neither power nor energy to keep up the *prestige* of our race."

"She may regain them, Sir Alan!"

"Never! I am convinced that to her life's end she will be a hopeless invalid. And your peculiar brightness and vitality seem to make the contrast still more distressing. Poor, poor Alice!"

"Well, Lady Chichester has an alleviation to her troubles at all events, Sir Alan, in a good and faithful husband," said Miss Murray.

The baronet winced.

"Yes. I *have* been faithful to her, Heaven knows. For twenty years I have never uttered a word of love to any other woman. And my heart has been as faithful as my lips. But now—what shall I say now, Cora?"

"I don't know;" she whispered, with downcast eyes.

"Nor I either," he replied, pulling himself together; "but if it were the truth I am afraid it would not be very satisfactory. But here we are at the station. Woa! mare! steady—steady! That's it!" and throwing the reins to his groom Sir Alan assisted Miss Murray to alight.

"Come back *soon*," were the last words he whispered to her as he held her hand in a farewell grasp, "and remember there is *someone* at Glebe Royal who prefers your face to your back."

"Write and tell me all about your friend's arrival, and exactly how long he intends to stay with you, and I will try and return in time to catch a sight of him," was her reply.

CHAPTER X.

CAPTAIN FAUNTLEROY'S SUSPICIONS.

WHEN Captain Fauntleroy arrived, his friend found that his chief reason for a visit to Glebe Royal was to ask his advice on the knotty question of whether he should retire from the army or not. He was a man who greatly disliked foreign service, and a rich godfather from whom he had expectations had offered to make him an annual allowance if he would remain in England. But Fauntleroy was of active habits, and felt he could not live a life of idleness, at the same time that he would not have sufficient money to go about and enjoy himself. So he had come in his perplexity to Sir Alan.

"Stop at home, old fellow, by all manner of means," cried the baronet heartily; "we'll find you some appointment, never fear, or, what is better, an heiress, with whom you can settle down near Glebe Royal. I've been breaking my heart over the prospect of losing you. Marry, Hal! get hold of some woman with money, that's my advice, and cut the service altogether."

Fauntleroy's brow contracted as if with pain. "Don't talk like that, Alan. I've told you already that I shall never marry. This is simply a question of whether I can live on my half-pay and the income my godfather proposes to allow me. If I can keep

a couple of hunters on it, my mind is made up, but I could not give up hunting for any man alive."

"Of course you couldn't. I was talking of your love of it only the other day to Miss Murray, and saying how thoroughly you and she would agree upon the subject."

"Miss Murray! Is that Alice's companion?"

"Yes."

"But what can she know of hunting?"

"Why, my boy, she's one of the most splendid horsewomen I ever met. She rides straight as a dart. She's the admiration of the whole field. I've been mounting her on Ariel, but I think I shall let her try Rochet. I believe she could manage anything."

Captain Fauntleroy smiled.

"It seems strange to hear of a 'companion' hunting. I don't know why it should, but I suppose one generally imagines them to spring from a class too poor for luxuries."

"But Miss Murray has been used to a very different position. Her family was very rich, but they have come down in the world. It is sad for her, poor girl, but she bears it bravely."

"And she is so accomplished, Henry," chimed in Lady Chichester; "she sings and plays beautifully. I wish you could have seen her. It is such a disappointment to me that she had to go to London just at this time. I want you and Cora to be friends."

"So you have arrived at calling her by her Christian name, Alice?"

"O dear, yes. You don't know what she has done

for me by her kindness and attention. I owe her a great deal. Don't you see how much better I am, Henry? I even walk a little now in the morning when the weather is fine. Her society has done me more good than all the doctor's physic. Hasn't it, dear Alan?"

"It has indeed, Alice."

"And she is so pretty too, Henry. She has the loveliest dark eyes, and such a sweet smile. I am sure you would admire her."

"I don't know. I prefer fair women to dark."

"But you couldn't help liking Cora. She is so clever and entertaining. O Alan! I have thought of a capital plan."

"What is that, my dear?"

"Henry shall marry Cora. Wouldn't it be delightful, and then they should both live at Glebe Royal with us. How I wish it could come true."

Fauntleroy only laughed at the wasted display of energy with which her ladyship clasped her little hands together as she gave utterance to the idea, but her husband appeared to be unnecessarily annoyed by it.

"Don't talk such nonsense," he said sharply, "you might be a child of ten years old. You have heard Hal say over and over again that he never intends to marry, and as to Cora, I mean Miss Murray, I should hardly think she was a woman to choose a husband in a hurry."

Lady Chichester's meek eyes filled with tears.

"It was only a joke," she said deprecatingly.

"A very unbecoming joke in my opinion. Please

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don't repeat it," he answered curtly as he turned away. Alice left her seat, and, going to the further end of the drawing-room, commenced turning over the contents of a drawer, whilst the baronet continued his conversation with his friend.

Presently her plaintive voice was raised to attract her husband's notice.

"Alan, dear!"

"Well!"

"I can't find Cora's photograph. Have you taken it?"

"Taken it? What the d——l should I take it for?"

"Don't be angry, dear. I only thought you might have done so. But where can it be, then? I am sure I put it in this drawer."

"What do you want it for?"

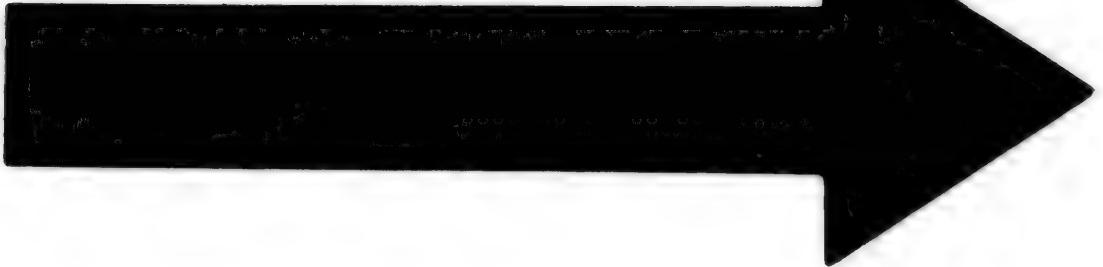
"To show to Henry. I want him to see what a handsome girl she is."

"Nonsense! Don't bother Hal about such trifles. What can he care if your companion is handsome or ugly. It's no affair of his. Come back and lie down on your sofa, or we shall be having you so tired that you cannot sit up at dinner."

"Does Alice actually appear at the dinner table? That *is* good news!" exclaimed Captain Fauntleroy.

"O! yes! she has made wonderful strides since Miss Murray took her in hand," said the baronet. "But I don't suppose it will be of any permanent use," he added in a lower tone, and to his friend's mind a very indifferent one.

Lady Chichester failed to find the photograph, but



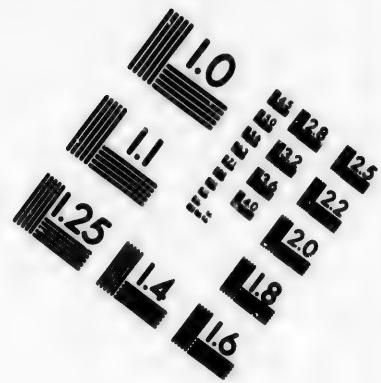
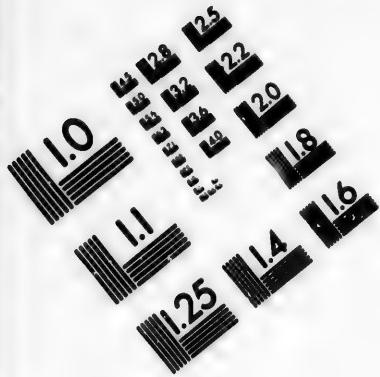
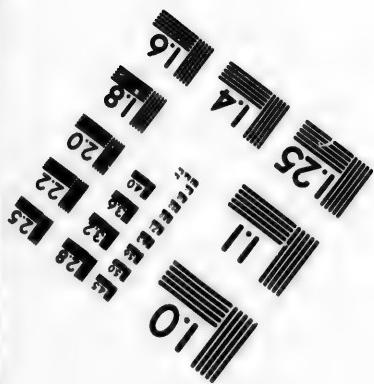
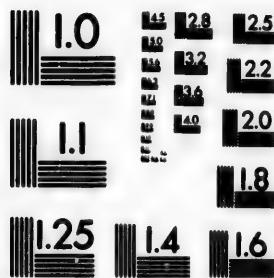


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she continued to talk of her young companion's mental and personal beauties, until Fauntleroy wondered how such a *rara avis* had ever been allowed by the world of men to be the architect of her own fortunes. He was honestly pleased, however, to be able to conduct Lady Chichester to the dinner table after so long an interval, and to observe that she really seemed stronger and more cheerful than she had been for years. But when the ladies had retired, and he hastened to congratulate his old friend on the change of affairs, he fancied again that Sir Alan was strangely indifferent to the subject.

"Let me wish you joy, old fellow," he commenced as soon as they were alone; "your dear wife is decidedly better. She seems to me to have taken out a new lease of life. It is quite wonderful to see her sitting at table and eating like other people."

"I don't suppose it will last, Hal. Jolliffe seems to think she has some internal complaint. I should not be surprised to hear any day she was on the sofa again."

"O! you mustn't look at things in that gloomy light, Alan! Of course I can understand that the matter is one of such vital importance to you that you are almost afraid to hope too much, still, anyone can see the improvement in Alice's health. It is palpable. Had she any organic disease, she would grow steadily worse. Jolliffe must be mistaken."

"I don't know why he should be. He is a very clever doctor."

"But why then doesn't he name the disease she suffers from?"

"He says he is not prepared to do so just yet, but will give me his decision in the course of a few weeks."

"But the suspense must be intolerable to you. Why not send for a specialist from London?"

"Because I have no faith in any of them doing her any good, Hal. Alice has been like this for years, and she never will be any better. That's my belief."

"But she *is* better! I can see that without any medical knowledge. She has lost her apathy in a considerable degree."

"Ah! that is Miss Murray's doing! She is a girl with an enormous amount of vitality and energy, and she infuses it unconsciously into every one with whom she is brought into contact. Were she to leave us, I believe Alice would very quickly sink into her old state of inactivity again."

"Then I don't wonder at your not wanting to part with her, even for *me*," replied Fauntleroy laughing. But though he laughed outwardly, he felt grave. Something was altered in Sir Alan Chichester as well as in his wife, though he would have been puzzled to say what it was. After dinner, some business connected with the estate took the baronet to his private sitting room, and Fauntleroy, pipe in hand, accompanied him. Webster, the bailiff, had to be admitted to a conference concerning a dispute over a chandler's bill, and as Sir Alan hastily turned over the papers and receipts in a drawer of his writing-table, Fauntleroy caught sight of a photograph. He thought nothing of it at the time, but when the baronet was compelled to accompany the bailiff to

the stables for a few minutes and left him there, with the drawer open, idle curiosity alone impelled him to take up the photograph and examine it. It represented a young woman of perhaps two or three and twenty, sitting in a careless attitude with her arms thrown back, and her hands clasped above her head. Her large eyes were gazing upwards, and her profile and figure were both clearly lined against the artistic background. As Fauntleroy caught sight of the picture he started violently, and when Sir Alan re-entered the room he found him gazing at it as if he were spell-bound. As the baronet discovered his occupation he also started and colored, much after the fashion of his friend.

"Hullo ! Hal," he tried to say indifferently, "what have you got there ? "

Fauntleroy answered the question with another.

"Alan !" he exclaimed, "*who is this ?*"

"*That !* By Jove ! that's the photograph Alice was looking for. Where did you find it ? In my drawer ? She must have put it there herself. I think her memory gets worse every day."

"But, Alan, *who is it ? Do you know the original ?*"

"What ! Smitten already ? Of course I know her ! That's Miss Murray, my wife's companion !"

"Murray ! Murray !" repeated Fauntleroy, in a puzzled tone, "this is Miss *Murray*."

"Certainly ! What do you think of her ? Though that photo doesn't do her justice. She is really a glorious looking creature." Then he added, as though afraid he had said too much, "I wish Alice wouldn't litter my table drawers with her rubbish ! I hate to have women messing about my things."

Captain Fauntleroy had recovered himself by this time.

"Where did you meet with this—this young lady?" he inquired.

"I had nothing to do with it. Old Jolliffe recommended that Alice should have a companion, and his sister-in-law sent Miss Murray down. But she has proved to be a lucky find for us. Alice is quite devoted to her."

"And of course you know her antecedents."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed the baronet firing up.

"Nothing but what I say. I suppose Miss Murray is an undoubted gentlewoman. Murray is a good name. Perhaps you know her family?"

"I know no one but herself, but Dr. Jolliffe's sister ascertained all that was necessary. And if you had seen her, you would never ask another question on the subject."

"I wish I *had* seen her, as she seems to be such a fascinating young woman. Perhaps I may still. When does she return to Glebe Royal?"

"I don't know. Alice can doubtless inform you," replied the baronet, who seemed to have taken a sulky fit. "Meanwhile, if you're done with that photograph, I'll lock it up again."

"I thought it was Alice's property. Shall I take it to her?" asked Fauntleroy quietly.

"Just as you like," replied Sir Alan, and he shut the drawer with a bang and put the keys in his pocket.

Captain Fauntleroy carried off the photograph of

Cora Murray, but he forgot to deliver it to Lady Chichester. On the contrary, he took it up to his own room and sat for a long time contemplating it before he went to rest.

"*Cora Murray!*" he thought, "*Cora Murray!* Is it possible you can be one and the same with Charlotte Mapleson? You *must* be! There cannot be two women so exactly similar in the world. But how have you come here? And what has made you choose the unsophisticated life of a lady's 'companion?' No wonder that you can ride to the admiration of the county, and sing and dance and play. I wonder what there was that you could *not* do in the old days. And where can your 'guardian' be? That brute who quenched all my hopes in the most devilish manner that ever turned a lover to a fiend. O Lotta! how much you have to answer for!"

He bowed his head for a moment on his hands, as if overcome by the recollections engendered by her name, but when he raised it again his face was calm.

"I *must* see her," he thought, "by hook or by crook. I must ascertain, before I leave England, if she is living the life she ought to do, as the companion of that pure, innocent-minded creature, Alice Chichester. And if *not*—well, whatever it costs me, I must expose her for the sake of my old friendship for Alan. If she has heard my name, as no doubt she has, I don't wonder at her being called away to London just as I am about to visit Glebe Royal. And she will not come back either whilst I am here. I will say good-bye to them on the day I first in-

tended, as if it were for good and all, and then, if it is in any way possible, I will return for a few hours without giving them any notice, and see if I can catch her unawares. Even if I spare her the disgrace of exposure, I must satisfy myself that it is *she*, and that she will behave herself properly whilst she is here."

And with this resolution, Captain Fauntleroy was fain to rest content.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GUARDIAN AND TRUSTEE.

MEANWHILE, Miss Murray, having reached the end of her journey in safety, drove straight to a quiet hotel in Jermyn street, where she asked to be shown the private apartments of Mr. Masham. She was confronted, as she entered them, by a business-looking, middle-aged man, who was seated at a table covered with papers and engaged with correspondence.

"Well, Jack," she said familiarly, but not affectionately, as they found themselves alone, "and so I've come, you see. Now, is it a true bill that you are going to leave England, or only a ruse to get me up here?"

She threw her hat and mantle on the sofa as she spoke, and going to the mirror smoothed her ruffled hair with both her hands, and examined her general appearance critically as though she felt quite at home.

"It's a true bill enough," replied the man, as he rose and stood beside her, "and what's more, it's a deuced unpleasant one. Young Perry has committed suicide!"

Miss Murray turned round sharply and regarded him. Her face had become very pale, and her eyes had a frightened look in them.

"What!" she said under her breath.

"It's the truth, my dear. The young fool has shot himself, and some of your letters have been found upon him. His people are wealthy, and will certainly make a stir about the matter, and, as my name may be implicated, I have been warned to keep out of the way. So I start for the Brazils to-morrow evening. It will only be anticipating my departure by a few weeks, and under your new name *you* will be safe enough. But I would not trust the news to paper. I felt it would be safer to let you know by word of mouth, though there is no chance of its affecting you now."

But Miss Murray's lips were still white from the shock she had received, and she could only murmur:

"*Shot himself!* George Perry! O! what fools men are!"

"What fools you women make them you mean, Lotty," said Mr. Masham. "I warned you about this particular case, you remember, on more than one occasion. I told you the young fellow was ultra-sensitive, and took all you said in earnest. I know he confidently expected to marry you."

At that her lip curled.

"To marry me! What nonsense! A lad of twenty without a shilling of his own to depend on. My dear Jack, you make the unfortunate creature out a greater fool than he was."

"He loved you, my dear. He couldn't have given a greater proof of his folly than that."

"Thank you. But he has, at all events, been a fool in good company. And so he has gone, poor fellow! When did it happen?"

"Last Monday. He went to bed apparently as usual, and was found in the morning with his brains blown out. Forster wired the news at once, and I wrote to you. But, as I said before, you need not be the least uneasy about the matter. Only I thought I should like to see you before I started, and hear from your own lips how you are getting on at Glebe Royal."

"First rate. They make a regular pet of me. I have my own riding horse, and hunt three times a week, and Lady Chichester says she doesn't know what she would do without me."

"You have turned saint for her benefit, I suppose."

"Not quite that, but of course I am intensely proper, and read to her, and write her letters, and arrange her needlework, as if I had done nothing else all my life. She is a feeble little woman, without a will of her own, and I have magnetized her to sleep, each night, until she clings to me like a child to its mother."

"And the baronet—what of him ?'

Miss Murray laughed.

"Well ! I think he is pretty well magnetized too."

"Ah ! well, don't go too far this time. Remember your bread depends on it, and don't have a repetition of young Perry's case for heaven's sake."

"Why do you keep on alluding to young Perry ?" she said frowning. "I can't help it, if men will fall in love with me. Perhaps you would like me never to speak to one of the sex again. O ! by the way, talking of lovers, who do you think has turned up at Glebe Royal ? Henry Fauntleroy."

Mr. Masham whistled.

"By Jove! What did he say to you?"

"I've not seen him, my dear. *Pas si bête.* He's there now, or was to be, and directly I heard he was coming, I took the next train to London. It appears he is one of Sir Alan Chichester's oldest friends."

"Then they'll tell him you are at Glebe Royal."

"How can he recognize me under the name of Cora Murray? He only knew me as Charlotte Mapleson. Besides, he is only there for a couple of days, to say good-bye before sailing with his regiment for Gibraltar. It is lucky for me he has no chance of making a longer stay."

"I don't know that," replied Masham, thoughtfully. "Henry Fauntleroy was very much attached to you in the old days, and I expect that with a little of your feminine *finesse* you could soon make it right with him again now. You know, Lotty, that, though you are very handsome and very clever, you are no longer a girl, and a respectable marriage is the proper ending of all your sex."

"What a pity you didn't think of that yourself a long time ago," she said with a sneer.

Masham shrugged his shoulders. He was a stout, broad-made man, with grizzled hair and a florid complexion, not at all handsome, and rather "horsey" in appearance, but with a shrewd eye, and some amount of humor in his composition.

"It was, wasn't it, my dear," he answered quaintly, "but I should never have been a good enough match for you. I was only the lever to place you in the position to make one, which you would have done, long ago, had you not been so fastidious. But with

regard to Captain Fauntleroy, don't you think you could manage him now?"

"He is not worth the attempt. He has no more money now than he had when he was at Plymouth. I have heard Lady Chichester say he has nothing but his pay. Besides I have not the same faith in my powers that you have. Fauntleroy heard a great deal too much—thanks to your fear that he should take me from you—and I should not think he was the man to patch up a broken faith easily."

"Still, your bodily presence is very fascinating, Lotty, and you might try. I should like to see you happily married."

"Thanks again—for nothing. When I *do* marry, it will be to please myself and not you. But I can foresee a much better prospect looming in the future. Lady Chichester is in her last illness."

"Dear me. Is that really the case?"

"I am *sure* of it. The old doctor won't say so decidedly, because, as you know, these medical men always hold out hope to the last, especially with a lingering case. But he has confided to me that he believes her to have an internal complaint, and all her symptoms point to it. She is a regular invalid, passes half her time in bed, and can hardly eat or drink sufficient to keep her alive. She has picked up wonderfully since I went there, but I can see that every exertion she makes is too much for her, and, before long, she will lie on her sofa again all day, as she used to do."

"And is the baronet very devoted, Lotty?"

"To his wife—do you mean—or to me? Well,

he *would* be very devoted indeed, if I let him, but I won't. I intend to be very reticent, almost repulsive towards him whilst Lady Chichester lives, and attend closely upon her, and then—when Sir Alan wants a second wife, which won't be long. *Nous verrons!*"

"Is he an attractive man?"

"So, so," replied Miss Murray with an expressive gesture. "I suppose most women would call him handsome, but you know I am not easily satisfied. He is about fifty years of age, tall and good-looking, very talkative and very excitable. I see I am rather a revelation to him, and you men will go mad after any novelty. He has been a good boy all his life, and stuck close to his nonentity of a wife, and a most unpleasant maiden sister, with the foot of an elephant and the moustache of a grenadier. A woman between the two, who unites brains and character with a fair amount of youth and beauty, is something which he has never met with before. And so he runs after me like a calf after a cow."

"And the money?"

"O! they have lots of money and no children. That's where the shoe pinches. And they belong to one of the oldest families in the county too. Lady Chichester never goes out anywhere, but the big wigs call constantly to ask after her health. And Glebe Royal is a magnificent estate. I should say they must be worth at least ten thousand a year, perhaps more."

"It will be a grand thing if you jump into it, Lotty."

"I mean to jump into it, in due course of time."

But you must have patience, and let me play my cards my own way. To hurry matters would be to ruin my future chances, and as I don't care a pin for the man, I've no temptation to do that."

"Did you ever care for *anybody*, Lotty?"

"Perhaps! But it is not anyone you have suspected, or that I shall ever meet again. The world judges women very hardly, when it says we have no hearts. We all have hearts, but some of us have buried them out of sight, and don't care to remember even where they lie. But to return to our subject. Sir Alan is hooked—don't make any mistake about that; but the landing must depend entirely on time."

"How long is his wife likely to last?"

"That I can't say, but if the doctor is right, and she has an internal disease, she will sink very rapidly, for she has no strength to bear up against its inroads. I can see he is secretly alarmed about her, though he won't let the family see it. However, it must be settled one way or another soon."

"But should she recover?"

"Don't bother me with your suppositions, Jack. She *won't* recover. You may take my word for it, but should a miracle be performed on her behalf, well, there are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it. You should see the members of our hunt—squires, and lords, and sons of lords, and I might have my pick of the lot, if Sir Alan were not so jealous that he will not introduce anyone to me unless he is absolutely obliged. Ah! *mon ami*, I have the ball at my feet now, believe me, and I mean to kick it."

"I hope to goodness you will," replied Masham, "for I'm in such terribly low water I may never return to England, and I should like to hear you were comfortably settled, Lotty."

"At anybody's expense but your own, Jack!" she replied sarcastically. "I quite believe that, old boy."

"I don't see any need to sneer, Lotty. Whenever I've made a haul, you've had your share of it, and a good big share too, as you well know, and it would have gone on the same to the end if you'd only kept true to me. But there are some things a man can't stand, however fond he may be of a woman."

"O! bar sentiment for heaven's sake, Jack. You know I never took it kindly in the old days, and I'm not likely to begin now, when you're fifty, and it's over. Let's bury it, and have done with it! You have no more money, and I—well, my interest in you is pretty well exhausted. Let's talk of something pleasanter."

"All right. Do you make any stay here?"

"I promised to return on the third day. But not unless I hear that Fauntleroy is well off the premises. He might spoil everything just at this moment."

"How do you expect to receive the news?"

"Sir Alan said he would write to-morrow."

"I see! Well, what do you purpose to do this evening?"

"Anything, so long as it is not compromising. I can't afford to compromise myself at this juncture. We had better go to the theatre, and sup here afterwards. But for heaven's sake let us enjoy ourselves. You're a first-rate companion, Jack, when you leave

sentiment behind you. You ought to know by this time what a wishy-washy, worthless thing it is."

"Yes, when a woman has grown tired of it."

"That's just it, and I *have* grown tired of it. It's no use at all except as a means to an end, and our end was accomplished ages ago."

Mr. Masham answered nothing, but he looked at the handsome creature who stood with one foot on the fender, excitedly addressing him, with a sigh. He had no wish to renew the past, but he had not quite ceased to regret it, although he knew that Charlotte Mapleson was a woman without a heart, and with very little conscience. But she was beautiful, and when has virtue ever had the same power over men as beauty?

The meekest and purest spirit upon earth has no chance against a flashing eye, a dimpled chin and a seductive mouth. No woman ever knew her power better than Charlotte Mapleson, and though she had been unpleasant and almost insulting to this man, she atoned for it so amply afterwards that he waited on her pleasure for the rest of the day as if he had been a subject, and she a queen, and was almost happy in doing so. The following morning brought her a letter from Sir Alan Chichester, not by any means a familiar one, for the baronet was too sensible to compromise either her or himself, but a few ordinary lines to ask her to return on the third day as she had promised, as Captain Fauntleroy's time was very limited, and he could not possibly remain at Glebe Royal over Thursday.

"That decides me," said Miss Murray, "I shall not return until Friday."

"Upon my word, Lotty, I sometimes think you would be wiser to meet the man, and have it out with him."

"And why, my mentor?"

"Because, what can he say of you after all? You may have flirted with him—and that's an open question—but no one can blame you for not marrying him. If you'd married every man who has happened to ask you, you'd have a masculine harem, by Jove."

"That may be true, Jack, but Fauntleroy's knowledge doesn't stop there, I'm afraid. He knew Rodney after you had quarreled with him."

"The d——l he did! Where did he meet him?"

"At the old diggings at Newmarket, I suppose."

"And who told you of it?"

"Rodney himself, the night he threatened me. That is the only reason I want to evade Fauntleroy. I think the poor fellow was fond of me, and he would meet me with a torrent of reproaches, and blurt out the whole story before Sir Alan. O! it would never do. When I heard how well he knew them all, I blessed my lucky stars I had changed my name."

"It was cute of you, Lotty, but you always are cute. Still I stick to my opinion, and say, meet Fauntleroy if you can, alone, and secure his silence. There is no need to advise you *how*. You could make him believe anything you chose, and Rodney's spite will easily pass for jealousy."

"If I am *obliged* to meet him, I will remember what you say, Jack, but I should like to get my affairs settled before we do meet, and then I can snap my

fingers at him. And unlikelier things have happened, because he is just about to sail with his regiment to Gibraltar, and won't come back under three years. And what may *not* happen in three years, Jack? Why, if I am not Lady Chichester by that time, I shall be on to 'fresh fields and pastures new,' where the virtuous Fauntleroy shall know me no more."

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CHAPTER XII.

THE RETURN OF THE WANDERER.

SIR ALAN CHICHESTER felt rather disappointed that Miss Murray's first question, when he met her at the railway station, should be after his absent friend. He had dressed himself up with the utmost care in order to welcome her back to Glebe Royal. His top-coat and driving gloves were faultless, in his button-hole bloomed a tiny branch of waxen stephanotis from the conservatory, and his face was radiant with the anticipation of meeting. Yet the first words she spoke were:

"Has Captain Fauntleroy left Glebe Royal?"

"Yes. He went last night. But why are you so anxious to know? Are you disappointed at not meeting him? He's not a bit handsome, if that's what you've been thinking."

But the arch glance she threw at him dispelled the fit of jealousy at once.

"Suppose I asked the question because I prefer that we should be alone, Sir Alan? I can assure you I have no wish to see any strangers introduced to our circle. We are so very happy, are we not, all to ourselves? Anything like a change must be for the worse."

"I should think so," replied the baronet, squeezing

her hand, as he helped her into the dog-cart, "though Fauntleroy's an old chum of mine, and has been welcome to come and go as he pleased. But I'm afraid he found me a dull companion this time."

"Why?" demanded Miss Murray, innocently.

"As if you didn't know *why*. We have all been miserable without you, Miss Murray. The house hasn't been the same thing at all, and as for my poor wife, she has done nothing but fret after you and talk of you, and I believe old Jane Wood nearly bullied her into fits last evening for ingratitude towards herself."

"Dear Lady Chichester," murmured Cora, softly. "I shouldn't have left her on any account had it not been absolutely necessary. But my poor guardian is very ill, Sir Alan, very ill indeed. He is going abroad for his health at once, and I greatly fear I shall never see him again. And he is the only friend I have in the world."

"No, no! you mustn't say that," cried Sir Alan, heartily. "We are all your friends at Glebe Royal, and as for myself, I feel I can never repay you for the services you have rendered my wife. You shall never want a guardian whilst I live, Cora."

"I don't deserve your kindness, but it is an estimable comfort to me," she said, sweetly, and then she added in a brisker tone, "and so your poor friend has really left England for good. How you must have felt parting with him!"

"He is bound to sail with the regiment next Monday week," returned the baronet, "but I hope he will not stay in Gibraltar long. I have been trying to

persuade him to sell out, and settle down with a nice wife near Glebe Royal. He's a dear old fellow, and would make an excellent husband, but he is a regular misogynist. He had a great disappointment some years ago, and I think it has made him a bit shy of the fair sex."

"A disappointment! How romantic! There are so few men in the present day with feeling enough to be disappointed—that is for long. But is there no chance of the young lady and himself coming together?"

"O! not the slightest. She was a regular bad lot. He wouldn't have anything to do with her if he could. He hates the very thought of her."

Miss Murray pursed up her mouth.

"I am afraid I have been indiscreet in putting the question, Sir Alan. Such persons are best not alluded to. I am very sorry for your friend, but I should think his common sense would show him the folly of avoiding all women for the sake of one worthless one. Perhaps, after all, he may find his consolation in Gibraltar. I hope Lady Chichester has not neglected to take her daily drive during my absence?"

"You must ask her that yourself, Miss Murray, for my time has all been taken up with Fauntleroy. He was quite pleased to think you were keeping 'Cock Robin' in exercise for him, and astonished to hear you could ride 'Ariel' out hunting, for, to tell you a secret, 'Ariel' has sent Hal over his head more than once at a flying leap. But, as I told him, you could manage anything, myself included."

"I hope you didn't say *that*, Sir Alan?"

"Well, not exactly, perhaps, but I know I felt it. The fact is, Cora, you're knocking me into a cocked hat. I have felt like a silly boy all the time you've been away, and my thoughts have invariably turned to the one vital question, 'How soon shall I see her again?' These three days have seemed like three years. What devilment have you exercised over me to change the whole of my life like this?"

"Hush! Hush! Sir Alan," replied Cora, as the dog-cart turned into the gates of Glebe Royal, "you mustn't speak to me like that, indeed you mustn't. Remember I am only a weak girl, and that life is hard enough to me as it is—without *you*," she added, in a low tone that spoke volumes.

It was a speech calculated to draw a man on, instead of repulsing him, and she knew it but too well. The baronet looked eagerly in her face as she finished speaking, but she had dropped her eyes and he could read nothing further. But there was an increase of confidence in the way in which he drew his mare up at the hall door, and exclaimed, "Here you are, Miss Murray, home again, and you won't get another holiday in a hurry, I can tell you."

She laughed as she jumped lightly to the ground, and ran past him to the drawing-room. But she knew that she had riveted another link in his fetters.

Poor Lady Chichester was absurdly delighted to see her young companion again, and tears of excitement mingled with her smiles of welcome. She began at once a detailed description of all her feelings and symptoms during Cora's absence, and how she had quite forgotten to take her drops before din-

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ner, and Jane Wood had neglected to put her second cushion in the carriage, and so she had been suffering with a backache ever since yesterday's drive.

"Don't you think we might entertain Miss Murray with something livelier than a description of your ailments, Alice?" demanded her husband, somewhat crustily. "She has only just come off a long journey and must be tired. Order in tea, or wine, or something. It wants a good two hours yet to dinner time."

"O! thank you, Sir Alan," exclaimed Cora Murray, "but I would much rather wait until her ladyship's afternoon tea. I am not at all tired—how often am I to say that *nothing* tires me—and I will run up first and change my dress, if Lady Chichester will permit me."

"No, Cora," pleaded her ladyship, retaining her hand, "don't leave me. I cannot part with you yet. Ring the bell, like a dear girl, and order in the tea-tray, and then come and tell me all you have been doing since we parted. It seems such a long time since you went away, and old Jane has wearied me so with her foolish chatter that I have been too tired to sleep after it."

"I see it is quite time I returned, Lady Chichester. You are actually looking paler than when I left Glebe Royal. I shall send you to bed very early to-night, and old Jane must talk to herself, for I will not allow her to worry you."

The baronet, finding that the current of conversation had turned in an entirely feminine direction, stalked, somewhat offended, from the apartment,

but when Miss Murray went up to her room to make the necessary changes in her toilet, she found a little bouquet of hothouse flowers on her table, that told their own tale. And as Sir Alan glanced up as she entered the dining-room, he saw that they were blooming in her bosom.

That was a merry evening for all of them, except Miss Chichester, who was indignant at the fuss made by her brother and his wife over the return of the "companion."

Cora Murray was in the highest spirits and most delightful of moods. She rattled off a lively description of all she had seen and heard in London, caricaturing people and things till Sir Alan was convulsed with laughter, and even Alice joined in his merriment. Nor did Miss Murray monopolize all the conversation. She took care to draw her friends out in return to tell her every minutia connected with Captain Fauntleroy's visit to Glebe Royal, and, as far as it was possible, what remarks he had made on hearing of her presence there.

"We told Henry *everything*, dear Cora," cried Lady Chichester, enthusiastically, "and he was almost as anxious to see you as we were. And I wanted to show him your photograph too, but I couldn't find it. By the way, dear, do you know where it was put?"

"In the drawer of your writing table, I think, Lady Chichester."

"So did I, but I cannot find it. I *hope* no one has stolen it."

"A thief would scarcely purloin such a *very* worth-

less article," replied Miss Murray, smiling, but as her eyes met those of the baronet, she guessed who the thief had been.

Lady Chichester's excitement at getting her young friend back again tired her so, that she was quite willing to accede to her proposal that she should go to bed at nine o'clock, and when Cora had magnetized her to sleep, she stole quietly out of her room, intending to go to her own. But in the dark corridor she was met by the baronet, who had been lying in wait for her.

"Sir Alan," she whispered, as he caught her hand, "you must not detain me. Miss Chichester has not yet retired. She may appear at any moment."

"And if she did, what harm is there in my exchanging a few words with you? I might be inquiring after my wife. And I *must* speak to you, Cora. I cannot sleep until I have told you how glad I am to see you back at Glebe Royal. And promise it shall be the last time you ever go away."

Cora laughed softly.

"That would be very rash on my part, Sir Alan, but I will promise never to leave you unless there is an actual necessity for doing so."

"But I cannot live without you, Cora. I have tested my heart in these few days, and it has spoken the truth. *I love you!*"

"Hush! You mustn't say that. Whatever you feel you must keep it to yourself. It would be very wrong of me to listen, and very foolish, because—because—"

"Because *what*, my darling?"

" My heart would speak too, were I not afraid to listen to it. Have pity on me, Sir Alan. Remember that I am alone and unprotected. Do not force me to seek refuge from you in flight."

" Good heavens! No! I will never open my lips again, sooner than you should think of such a thing. *I could* not part with you. Only it would make me so happy if you would but say three words."

" And what are they?"

" I love you."

" Cannot you guess? What need is there of speaking? Why make me confess my weakness? But if it is to make you happier—I love you."

His arms were clasped round her in a minute, and his heavy moustache brushed against her lips. And she submitted—although she loathed herself and him whilst she did so.

" Let me go now," she whispered, " or some one may come this way."

He kissed her again and again before he released her, and she left him trembling with the passionate instincts she had provoked.

His was a coarse-fibred nature which needed coarse nutriment, and the life of enforced restraint which he had been compelled to lead had well-nigh dried up the generous current of his blood, until her charms had set it flowing. She appealed to the lowest part of his nature, but also to the most powerful, and for the time being he was infatuated.

He remained motionless, gazing after the place where she had disappeared, and then he stooped down and kissed the spot where her feet had stood.

"Good gracious! Alan, what on earth are you doing there? I might have fallen over you," exclaimed the harsh voice of Miss Chichester, as she came upon him whilst thus employed. "Have you lost anything?"

He might have answered, "*My senses*," but he only muttered something about dropping his breast-pin, as with a very red face he rose to his feet again, and began fumbling with his necktie.

"Well, I don't see how a breast-pin can fall out upon the ground, and I don't believe you're telling the truth," said Miss Chichester, with more acumen than politeness, as she strode onwards to her bedchamber.

But what cared the baronet for any of his sister's sarcasm when he met Cora Murray at breakfast the following morning radiant with youth and beauty, and ready to join in any of his favorite pursuits.

"It isn't a hunting morning," he observed, "and I am glad of it, for you had a fatiguing journey yesterday, and I can't have you knocked up. But if you feel inclined to ride out as far as Battersby, I want to look at some young cart-horses there that Meason has for sale. Do you think you can manage it?"

"I am *sure* I can. It will be delightful," she answered, brightly.

"Have you obtained Lady Chichester's permission?" asked Miss Chichester, grimly.

"I never go anywhere without first asking her ladyship's permission," said Cora.

"And, by Jove! it's no business of yours if she didn't," added the baronet, with a frown.

"Miss Chichester is very kind to remind me of my duty, only I trust that I don't need reminding," interposed Miss Murray, sweetly.

"I'm sure you don't, you are simply devoted to Alice, and no one is better aware of what she owes to your care and attention than I am," said Sir Alan.

His sister was just about to make some caustic reply when the door of the breakfast-room was suddenly thrown open, and in walked, without ceremony or warning, Captain Henry Fauntleroy.

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CHAPTER XIII.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

To say that his entrance caused a general surprise is nothing. Sir Alan—who believed his friend to be in Cumberland—first stared at his apparition with round, open eyes, and then burst into a noisy shout of welcome. Miss Chichester displayed her teeth, and declared he was the last person on earth she expected to see, and Miss Murray, who was supposed, naturally, never to have met Captain Fauntleroy before, dropped her maiden glance upon her breakfast plate, whilst the hot blood surged into her face, and she tried with all the will of which she was capable to force down the violent beating of her heart and the heaving of her bosom.

Henry Fauntleroy's eyes traveled, first of all, to the drooping figure of the companion and recognized it, with a sudden access of feeling of which he had believed himself to be cured, whilst his countenance became as pale from emotion as her's was red from mingled shame and fear. But he shook it off bravely, and turned to grasp the baronet's outstretched hand.

"You are all surprised to see me back again, like a bad half-penny," he said in rather an uncertain voice; "but I found I could spare you another day, Alan, and I was loath to miss one, when so few remain for me at Glebe Royal."

"Right you are, Hal!" cried Sir Alan; "but why did you ever leave us, old fellow? I thought you were safe in Cumberland by this time."

"I always intended to see my old friend, Dr. McPherson, on the way, you know," replied Captain Fauntleroy, mendaciously, "and whilst there I received a telegram to say my brother will not be at home till to-morrow, so I thought I would worry you in the meanwhile."

He had concocted this ingenious fable on the way there, but it served to blind the eyes of the baronet and his sister.

"Well, sit down, old man, and have some breakfast," said the former, cheerily. "I am sure you must have started without it, for you look blue with the cold. It's a sharp frost this morning, hang it! We shall have no scent left if this weather goes on. Miss Murray and I were going to ride out to Battersby —O! by the way, I never introduced you, but there's not much need, I expect you have heard all about each other! Miss Murray, this is my old friend, Captain Fauntleroy."

The companion bowed, scarcely raising her eyes as she did so, but slight as the glance was, it was sufficient to let her catch the expression in that of her old acquaintance, and she despised herself for the faintness that came over her, and the want of moral courage she displayed.

"After all," she said, inwardly, "what have I done that I should fear him? If he has come here with the intention of betraying me, I will *dare* him to say what he knows to my detriment."

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And with that resolution she looked at Henry Fauntleroy a second time, smiling sweetly as she did so, and sent such a flood of unhappy recollections sweeping through the poor man’s brain that he became confused and incoherent, and made his uneasiness palpable to all present. As he played with the viands they had placed before him, Sir Alan attacked him again on the subject of the proposed ride.

“You had better come to Battersby with us, Hal, if you’re not tired,” he said. “I want to see Meason’s cart foals. It’s a charming ride, and will freshen you up, and, by Jove! you look as if you wanted freshening. What’s the matter with you? Have you been traveling all night?”

“O no! I started at seven this morning.”

“Then you must be bilious. However, a good gallop will set you all right. We would go over to the kennels instead—you remember I wanted you to see those new pups of ‘Regent’ yesterday—only Miss Murray and I have already made our plans for the morning.”

“Sir Alan,” interposed the companion, in her rich soft voice, “please don’t consider me. I would rather attend her ladyship’s summons. I would indeed.”

“O nonsense! Alice never wakes till ten or eleven—you know that well enough—and we’ll be back before she is out of bed. Besides, I want Fauntleroy to make your acquaintance. He was so disappointed at missing you before.”

Miss Murray—who had risen from the table—was about to reiterate her request, when Miss Chichester (who had already reached the door) called sharply

to her brother, "Alan! Come here! I want to speak to you."

The baronet was in politeness bound to obey. In another moment, she had drawn him into the hall beyond. Henry Fauntleroy saw his opportunity, and caught at it. He rose also and stood by Cora's side, looking out upon the Park.

"I must speak to you alone," he said, in a hurried whisper. *When and where can I see you?*"

"Are you here to injure me?" she asked him in return, looking him full in the eyes.

"By heavens, *no!* but I will not leave till I have spoken to you. Quick! where shall it be?"

"In my sitting-room on the landing, in an hour's time," she answered.

"You will not deceive me? If you do—" he commenced.

"You will tell Sir Alan," she answered calmly. "No, I will be there."

At this juncture the baronet returned, looking rather crusty. Miss Chichester had been taking him sharply to task for evincing so much interest in his wife's companion, and knowing what his private feelings were on the subject, Sir Alan felt very much like a boy who has been discovered with his pocket full of apples during school time. If his hawk-eyed sister were going to peep and pry after all he said and did in the future, he recognized that his life would not be worth living.

"Come along," he exclaimed curtly, "don't let us waste all the morning. Have you made up your minds what you are going to do?"

"I am altogether at your disposal, Alan," replied Fauntleroy.

"And I," said Cora, with downcast eyes, "think it would be better if I stayed at home, at all events for to-day. It is the first morning after my return, you see, Sir Alan, and Lady Chichester may ask for me on waking, and as you have Captain Fauntleroy for company, you will not need mine."

"All right. Do as you please," said the baronet sulkily, but Miss Murray did not mind his sulks, for she knew she could cure them at her will. All she thought of at the moment was how to conciliate the other man. So she turned her glorious eyes on him with a beseeching look in them, and said, "I do not suppose you will be gone more than an hour."

"O no," answered Fauntleroy, significantly, "we shall be back in an *hour*. You may depend upon that."

The baronet glanced from one to the other with a puzzled air. What was it to Miss Murray *when* Captain Fauntleroy would be back at Glebe Royal, and what right had his friend to determine the length of his absence for him? And (when he came to think of it) why had Hal returned to them in so mysterious a manner, unless it had been for the express purpose of meeting Lady Chichester's companion? Sir Alan was a very jealous man, and his suspicions were quickly roused. He hurried Fauntleroy away after this little episode, as though he had detected him in a crime, and the latter was not slow to detect the feeling he had so suddenly evoked. Miss Murray watched them leave the room, and then stole quietly

up to her own (which she had made far more home-like in its appearance by this time), and tried to think what was best to be done. Had Fauntleroy deceived her, and would he tell the whole story of their acquaintance to the baronet during their morning ride? She thought *not*. Though it was five years since they had met, she remembered enough of his honorable sentiments and behavior to believe that he would never lose the instincts of a gentleman. He had said he would not injure her, and he would keep his word. Only, he might think it necessary to warn her off the premises of Glebe Royal, and then what would become of her little plans with regard to the baronet? She would not have been afraid of anything, had Fauntleroy not met with Rodney, who knew every circumstance of her former life. She pressed her forehead hard with both her hands as she remembered Rodney's power of betrayal, and wondered what falsehood she could invent with which to meet any probable accusations on Captain Fauntleroy's part. She was still thus occupied when she heard Miss Chichester's untuneful voice calling over the banisters on her name.

"Miss Murray! Miss Murray! where are you? John, go and find Miss Murray, and tell her to attend Lady Chichester's bell at once. It has rung twice for her. Anne, run up to her bedroom and see if she's there. If she is dressing for riding, say she can't go. Lady Chichester particularly desires her presence without any delay."

"I am here, Miss Chichester. You are giving yourself unnecessary trouble," replied Cora, appear-

ing at the door of her sitting-room ; "it is not often that her ladyship has to employ a messenger to take me to her side."

"Well, she has this morning at all events," replied the elder lady, tartly, "and I beg you will go to her at once. What with riding, and walking, and talking, it is difficult to know *where* to find you sometimes. One would imagine you had been engaged to be my brother's companion, instead of his wife's."

"That is Sir Alan's business, I suppose, and not yours or mine," replied Cora, in a dignified manner, as she passed Miss Chichester on the stairs and entered her ladyship's room. The old woman hated the younger at all times, but more especially when she put on her dignity. She could compete with rudeness, but not with the essence of silent indignation.

The urgent call to Lady Chichester's assistance proved to be an unnecessary one.

Alice had awakened, brighter and better than usual, and had asked for her young companion only that she might kiss her and thank her anew for having come back to her, whilst Jane Wood stood by, green with envy at the sight, and muttered to herself.

"O Cora, dear !" exclaimed Lady Chichester, with a happy sigh, "I think you must have brought back good luck with you, for I have had such a beautiful dream, all about the days when my darling Alan was wooing me to be his wife, and we looked forward to such a long, happy life of love together. I feel as if I had been in heaven."

"But it is all true," replied Miss Murray cheerfully.

" You talk as if you had been disappointed. When you are strong again, you will have all your heart can desire."

" Ah! *when*," sighed Alice, again, "*when*. And meanwhile I am nothing but a useless toy. O Cora! if I had but your life and beauty, how different life would be for me and my poor Alan."

" Lor! my lady," cried Jane Wood, indignantly, "you shouldn't bemean yourself by a comparison with anyone else, and, least of all, with them as is beneath you. Sir Alan wouldn't change you for the Queen on her throne. I'd take my oath of it."

" Jane! I will not allow you to speak like that. Miss Murray is my dear friend."

" Hush, dear Lady Chichester, Jane is quite right. I am beneath you in everything. And now shall I assist you to rise ? "

" No, I don't want to get up just yet; I am so afraid of losing the sense of that delicious dream. O Cora! some day I will tell you more about that happy time when I and Sir Alan were young. How handsome he was—the handsomest young man in the country side—and how he loved me! For he *did* love me, Jane, didn't he? *You* saw it all from the beginning."

" He worshipped the very ground you trod on, my lady. Everyone could see that, and so he do to this day, bless you, only the older we grows, the less we speaks our feelings out."

" Do you really think he *does*?" said Alice, with her blue eyes dimmed with tender recollections. " Sometimes I hope so too, and then sometimes I

fear that I have tired his patience out. Jane, tell Miss Murray what Sir Alan looked liked on our wedding day, when the church at my dear father's home was filled with the people who came to see us married, and amongst them all there wasn't a man who could hold a candle to my brave young husband of twenty-two, was there, Jane ? "

"To be sure not, my lady, but what business is it of Miss Murray's? She's got her own duties to look after, like all of us, and no time to go dreaming of the past, like your ladyship."

"But then I should like her to know how handsome he was in those days, Jane, how good and true to me. But he has always been *that*, God bless him! I believe in my Alan as I do in Heaven. And sometimes, Cora, I wonder if, when I am gone, he should marry again (as he *must*, you know, for the sake of the title), his second wife will ever love him as I have done."

"My lady, you mustn't talk such things," exclaimed Jane Wood. "A second wife indeed! You're far more likely to live to be married again yourself."

Alice's eyes dilated with holy horror.

"O Jane! think what you are saying," she cried.

"But Jane is right, dear Lady Chichester," interposed Cora, gently; "you should neither think nor speak of such an improbable contingency. There are many years of happiness before you both, and if there were not, I am sure Sir Alan is the last man in the world to dream of marrying again. Who would who had lost *you*?"

"I am a wicked, ungrateful woman ever to be sad

or desponding with such a husband and such a friend as you and Alan," replied Lady Chichester, smiling. "And now go, dear Cora, and leave me to myself, and I will close my eyes and try to dream that beautiful dream over again."

Miss Murray rearranged her pillows and kissed and left her, content and smiling, and walking back to her own room, shut herself in, and waited in perplexity and suspense for the advent of Captain Fauntleroy.

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CHAPTER XIV.

FOOLED TO HIS BENT.

AT the time appointed, he came, but she was prepared for him. As soon as he crossed the threshold of the door, she turned the key in the lock and laid her finger on her lip.

"If you *must* speak," she whispered, "do it in tones that cannot be overheard. The old woman has ears like a lynx, and is not above applying them, when necessary, to the keyhole."

She laughed a little as she concluded, but her laugh was very nervous. She could not think where all her courage had gone, nor why the presence of this man should make her feel timid, and even tearful. As he heard her injunction he came close up to her side.

"You *know* that I must speak," he replied, in a low voice; "that it would be impossible for me to meet you here—in intimate communion with the wife of my best friend—and to go away without asking you a single question. What would Sir Alan say to me if the truth were at any time revealed to him?"

"Then you mean to betray me, you have returned for that purpose," she said.

"Not if you satisfy me that there is no necessity

for it, that the past is really past, over, and done with for ever."

"I really don't understand you. What is there in my past to unfit me for the post of Lady Chichester's companion?"

"Have you not confessed it, Lotta? Did you not ask me if I intended to betray you?"

"I was merely alluding to such foolish passages as may have occurred between you and me, Captain Fauntleroy."

"*Foolish*, do you call them, Lotta? That is far too mild a term. Call them 'criminal' at once, for what greater crime can a woman commit than to lead a man to believe she loves him, and then, when he considers he has earned the right to claim her as his wife, to throw him aside like a worn-out glove, and mock at the life-long pain she has caused him? How much I wish that you and I had only been foolish. I should not then have felt the knife turn in the wound, as I do when I look at you even now."

He turned his face away from her as he spoke, and she was obliged to keep silence for a few minutes, in order to make her voice steady. She had never expected that his presence would affect her to such a degree, but the old times kept surging in her mind, and Fauntleroy had made more impression on her then than she had ever cared to acknowledge.

"Fauntleroy," she whispered, "don't be silly. I was not worth caring for. For heaven's sake let me hear what you have to say, and get this interview over."

"I am a fool," he said, slowly, "to suffer myself

to be overcome by a memory, but I never denied that I loved you. Yet, let us keep, as you suggest, to the question in hand. How is it I find you *here*?"

"The answer is very simple. I am cast on my own resources for a living, and there is no other means by which I can make one. I advertised for a situation, and was engaged by Lady Chichester. I didn't know they were your friends when I came to Glebe Royal."

"But that man then—Foster—what became of him?"

"You mean my uncle?"

"No," replied Fauntleroy, with a savage frown. "I do not mean your uncle. I mean the man you introduced to me under that name, but whom I found out afterwards to bear a very different relationship to you. It is useless your denying it, Lotta. I have met Paul Rodney and he told me *all*."

"Paul Rodney?" she said, elevating her dark eyebrows, "my greatest enemy, who swore to blast my character wherever he went! And what had that rascal to say to you of me?"

"Why should he be your enemy?"

"For a very common reason, for the same which makes you vindictive against me now. Because I refused him."

"I am not your enemy, Lotta," said Captain Fauntleroy in a meek voice; "I would not injure you for all the world. But I must know what sort of a life you are living now, if I am to leave you at peace under the roof of my friends."

At that suggestion, Cora Murray hid her face in

her hands, and commenced to weep in an unobtrusive, silent manner.

"O heaven!" she moaned, "it is very, *very* hard, that the stigma which others have cast upon a woman can never leave her, however earnestly she may strive to cast it off, but will keep cropping up to stab her to the heart, even at the hands of the man who professed to love her."

"It was no profession, Lotta, I *did* love you truly and devotedly, as I believed you loved me, and should have continued to do so to this day if you had evinced the slightest feeling for me in return."

"You men are so blind," she sobbed.

"Do you mean to tell me that you *did* feel for me when you refused my overtures of marriage with insult and scorn?"

"*He* did—the man who taught me to believe he was my uncle—not *I*—and it was Rodney who instigated him to the deed, because he hoped to marry me himself. But why refer to the miserable Paul. It is over and done with, and neither of your hearts are broken. Let it rest."

"The man who *taught* you to believe he was your uncle?" repeated Fauntleroy. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that I am a wretched waif and stray, who does not even know who her parents were—that I was picked up, or adopted, by Foster at an age too early for me to remember—that I always believed him to be my uncle till a short time ago, and was told that I owed him the obedience of a daughter. But when I found that I had been deceived I left

him, and determined to support myself. And now, I suppose you will take my living from me, and I let starve?"

"But where is this Foster?"

"In Australia, I think, but I am not sure. He left England some time ago."

"And where have you been since, Lotta?"

"Earning my daily bread as I do now, by waiting on the whims and fancies of other women, and having no will of my own. It is not a congenial life, as you may well imagine."

Henry Fauntleroy was silent for a few minutes. He knew this woman to be brilliantly accomplished, and he had seen her in a very different position. He could not quite understand *why* she should have chosen to sink herself and her identity to the level of a lady's companion, unless she had some ulterior motive for doing so. He was too sensible a man not to be suspicious, but at the same time he was longing to be convinced that his suspicions were wrong.

"I can well imagine," he said, after a pause, "that the position is most irksome to you, but tell me then, Lotta, why you adopted it. Last time I knew you, you were on the stage. Why did you not remain there?"

She cast down her eyes.

"O Fauntleroy, how can you ask me? Were *you* not the first to urge me to quit so perilous a profession? I suffered enough in following your advice, I can assure you, not only in loss of money, but in the resentment of my guardian, who abused me for what he termed my infatuation for yourself. But when

we parted, I threw up my engagement, and refused to take another, for I was too sad just then to think much of consequences, and so I lost my place in the theatrical profession, and should not find it easy to regain it."

"And you did this for *my* sake," he said, steadfastly regarding her. "How little I thought, when I searched the theatrical papers in vain for the name of Lotta Mapleson, that you had withdrawn it because *I* asked you. But there is another thing," he continued quickly, a second suspicion rising as fast as the first was quelled. "Why should you change your name? People who have nothing to be ashamed of do not conceal their identity in that manner. Why did you not come here as Miss Mapleson?"

"O Captain Fauntleroy, you are too hard on me," she cried, with tears in her eyes, "you are ready to believe the very worst. I am indeed unfortunate to have sunk so low in your estimation. Would it not have been folly of me to retain my own name, when it had appeared, as you have just confessed, in the columns of every theatrical newspaper? Was it not a very innocent deception to conceal the identity of Lotta Mapleson, the actress, under that of Cora Murray, the companion? I am no longer on the stage, I shall never return to it. Why should I mar my new career by placing it in the power of my new employers to trace my connection with the old one? Surely, you are not such a purist as to blame the girl who has done all in her power to follow the advice *you* gave her, even though she has been forced to deny her own name in order to do so."

"No! No!" exclaimed Fauntleroy, in genuine distress, "don't think so badly of me as that. I blame you for nothing, Lotta. I confess that, when I found that you were living with the Chichesters, I was a little startled, for Paul Rodney told me such a terrible scandal about you that I have had but one desire since, to forget that you ever existed. But if you can assure me that he lied, if you will tell me that there was no tie between you and that man Foster except the falsehood he had invented to keep you at his side, and that you are here for the sole reason of earning an honest livelihood, then Heaven forbid that I, of all men, should be the one to put a spoke in your wheel. I will go away, silent, as I came, and trust you to do your duty by both my friend and his wife."

"I knew you would never have the heart to betray me," said Cora, with a sob in her throat. "I felt sure that you—of all men—of all men—"

But she could not finish the sentence. Something seemed to rise in her throat and prevent it, and Henry Fauntleroy eagerly took up the parable.

"Go on!" he exclaimed; "why *me* of all men? Is it only because I loved you, Lotta?"

"No."

"Why then?"

"Because *I loved you!*"

"You loved *me?*" he reiterated, in astonishment.

"Why not?" she answered; "is there anything extraordinary in that? Are you so unloveable, or do you not credit me with the ordinary instincts of my sex? Would I have made the sacrifice I did if I had been indifferent to what you thought of *me?*"

"But, Lotta, one moment. If you loved me, why did you refuse my hand in marriage?"

"I never refused it. The man I called my uncle refused it for me, and I have already told you who instigated him to do it. And I suffered—Heaven alone knows how I suffered—from the effect of his decision."

"Surely you might have let me know it was against your wishes. You sent me from you broken-hearted—more than that, for I believed you to be unworthy of me, and that is the hardest of all griefs for a man to overcome. Why didn't you write to me, or follow me, and I would have sheltered you in my arms against a thousand such scoundrels as Rodney and Foster?"

"I did not know the extent of my power," she whispered. "I believed Foster to hold legal authority over me, and that he could use force to drag me back again."

Henry Fauntleroy's eyes began to gleam with the awakening fire of an almost forgotten passion. His frame trembled, as he pressed closer to her side, and the glamour of the past threw its unholy light once more upon the face and figure of Lotta Mapleson. She had always been a dangerous woman for him, and now, with the new belief that she had loved him all the while that he was grieving over her supposed indifference, she became more dangerous still.

He lost his usual common-sense, and thought only of her power over him, as he poured a second tale of passion in her ear.

"Lotta! Lotta!" he murmured, "it is not yet too

late. Let us forget and forgive all the past, and live for each other in the future. There is no one to come between us now. I am still poor, my darling, and I shall never be rich, but if you will be my wife, I can at least support you in comfort and save you from a life of servitude. Lotta, you will come to me." He threw his arms about her and laid his hot cheek against hers as he spoke, and for a moment Cora Murray wavered. There are times when the most worldly and dissipated of mortals long to fly from their surroundings to some blissful haven of rest, but such longings seldom last. Cora's face flushed, and her lips trembled, for Fauntleroy, without either good looks or means, had come nearer to touching her heart than any other man. But she could not afford to indulge in sentiment which carried poverty in its train. Her mind was bent just then on settling herself in marriage, but not with a penniless captain in a regiment of the Line. And so she lay very quiet, with her face against his, and murmured,

"Don't ask me, don't tempt me. I shall never marry."

"But why not, since you love me?"

"I am not worthy of you."

"That is all nonsense, and concerns no one but ourselves. The love I bore you in the past has rushed upon me again like an overwhelming flood. Lotta, be my wife."

"Impossible! I have promised never to leave Lady Chichester while she is ill."

"But will you give me no hope?"

"If you will join your regiment in Gibraltar as you

intended, and neither seek me out nor write to me until I give you leave, I will let you know when I have made up my mind. For you have asked me too suddenly. You must give me time to think. And meanwhile you must be silent as the grave. Will you promise me?"

"The conditions are hard, my darling, but I consent to them, for, before long, I feel you will be mine."

But as he left her, and the fascination of her presence faded from his view, and his fevered blood cooled down to its usual temperature, Captain Fauntleroy felt he had done a rash thing which it would be well to undo again; and Cora Murray recognized, with a heavy sigh, that she had turned for the second time from the advances of the only man she had ever cared for.

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CHAPTER XV.

AN UNHOLY CONTRACT.

CAPTAIN FAUNTLEROY left Glebe Royal on the following morning, this time without any intention of returning, and then Miss Murray found there was the baronet to conciliate before she could assume her former position in his good graces. For though she had been as cautious as her nature prompted her, and had scarcely addressed Fauntleroy for the remainder of the day, her lover had not been equally prudent. It is difficult for people who love each other entirely to conceal their feelings from the world, for eyes will speak though lips are shut, and Sir Alan had intercepted several glances that had made him feel uneasy. What business, he thought to himself, had Hal to be looking at Cora Murray in that "spooney" fashion, when he had never seen the girl until that morning? Was she, after all, a flirt, and had she, by word or deed, encouraged his evident admiration? The baronet's jealous temperament was roused, and he became unusually reserved with both the delinquents. A long evening spent together in the smoking room, and passed in recalling old reminiscences, somewhat restored his geniality towards his old chum, yet he was not sorry when the morning came, and he saw Fauntleroy drive

away in the dog-cart to the railway station. Such power have the charms of a worthless woman to upset a friendship of twenty years' duration. Miss Murray was not present to bid Captain Fauntleroy farewell. She purposely kept out of the way until she knew he had left the house, for she felt there was danger in their meeting, and she regretted having said as much as she had to him the day before. Men were so impulsive. There was no knowing what they might do under the influence of passion. Fauntleroy was even capable of resigning his profession, if it would keep him a few days longer by her side. And that was indeed what he had been thinking of ever since their interview—whether he should not close at once with his godfather's offer and remain in England to woo her for his wife. But she had asked him to go to Gibraltar with his regiment and leave her time to think, and like a gallant gentleman he consented. So he drove away from Glebe Royal with rather a heavy heart, and Miss Murray descended to the breakfast-room, and set to work to bewitch the baronet over again. But Sir Alan was a little sulky, and Cora had to flash her eyes several times at him before he consented to smile.

"Are you going to Battersby *this* morning, Sir Alan?" she inquired sweetly.

"It lies with you. You didn't seem to care about it yesterday."

"Indeed you are mistaken. Have you never heard of anyone relinquishing her own wishes for the sake of another? Captain Fauntleroy was your

guest, and I thought you should devote your time to him."

"Are you trying to teach my brother his duty, Miss Murray?" demanded Miss Chichester, with asperity.

"By no means, Miss Chichester. I should not presume to take such a liberty. I was only showing Sir Alan that I knew my own."

"I am glad you do," was the answer.

Cora smiled and glanced at the baronet. The smile said, "See what I suffer for your sake," and Sir Alan's heart softened.

"Well, will you come to Battersby this morning?" he asked her.

"With pleasure, if Lady Chichester does not require me."

"Lady Chichester is fool enough to say anything sooner than keep you to your duties," snapped Miss Chichester.

Sir Alan frowned.

"I beg you will remember who you are speaking of, Anna, and not call my wife a fool to my face," he said.

"I shall call her what I choose and yourself into the bargain," was the retort. "You're both fools, if that will please you better. *You*, for running all over the county with Miss Murray, and *she*, for allowing it. And so now you know *my* mind about the matter."

And with that, Miss Chichester left her seat, and stalked majestically from the room. Sir Alan and his companion stole a stealthy glance at one another,

but had no need to speak. Something told them both that things were coming to a crisis.

"Ought I to go?" asked Cora presently.

"Certainly," replied the baronet. "I'm not going to be bullied by my sister in this way. Besides, I have something particular to say to you. Make as much haste as you can, and I will order the horses to come round at once."

And in a few minutes more they were riding down the drive together.

"You are very silent this morning," remarked Cora, as they gained the high road to Battersby.

"I am thinking of my sister's confounded impertinence," he answered moodily. "Suppose she were to repeat it to Lady Chichester. She might make a nice mess of it for you and me."

"Nonsense, Sir Alan. You cannot believe Lady Chichester would be so foolish as to be vexed about our riding together. Why, it was *she* who urged it upon me. But you were not yourself all yesterday. I cannot imagine what has come to you."

He turned round on his horse to regard her.

"*You cannot imagine.* O what dupes you women try to make of us, when you know the reason as well as myself! Do you mean to tell me that you did not perceive how Hal Fauntleroy admired you? Why, he never took his eyes off you all day!"

"Captain Fauntleroy?" she said incredulously.
"O, Sir Alan, you must be mistaken."

"I couldn't mistake the evidence of my own eyes. It was palpable to everyone."

"But even if it were so, what harm does it do *me*?" she inquired.

"Well, I don't suppose it can do you any real harm, but I cannot stand it. I would... no man's eyes ever light upon you except my own. Cora, you don't know what I feel for you yet. You are driving me wild. If I cannot have you for my own, no other man ever shall."

"O, Sir Alan, have I ever given you any cause for jealousy? Have I—have I not sufficiently revealed my feelings to you in return? How *can* you fail to see—to see—"

"I *do* see it," he exclaimed fervently, as he laid his hand on hers, and brought their horses close together; "every dear look you give me, every word when we are alone, reveals the truth. But, oh Cora! where will it end? What are we to do with this terrible, delicious love of ours?"

"We must hope and wait," she answered; "no one knows what may lie in the future for us."

"Ah! my poor wife," he said, relinquishing her hand with a sigh. "I do not suppose there is any chance of her complete recovery. She seems to grow worse and worse to me instead of better. I often wonder what the issue of her illness will be."

"I am afraid to give you much hope, Sir Alan."

"No one can do that. I see what Jolliffe thinks of her plainly enough. Only yesterday, he spoke to me about having a specialist from London to consult upon her case. But it will be useless. I feel I am to lose her."

He rode on silently for a few minutes after that, with his head bowed forward, until Miss Murray's hand came stealing into his own.

"Dear Sir Alan, don't look like that. I have not much more faith in doctors than Miss Chichester, and Jolliffe is only a county practitioner. Let us wait and hear what the London specialist may have to say. He may discover it is a mare's nest after all."

"But in that case what is to become of you and me, Cora?"

"O! I am no one by comparison with her. Leave me to my fate."

"By George, I never will. Besides, my fate and yours are one. I should be wretched without you. If Alice were only strong and healthy like other women, I should say—"

He stopped at this juncture, as though ashamed to speak the words, as well he might be, and after a while she asked softly—

"What would you say, Alan?"

He turned towards her passionately.

"I should say, 'Come away at once, Cora, and end this life of torture, and begin a new one with me at the other side of the world.' Would you—would you?"

"It would be so wrong," she whispered.

"O! hang that. Everything is wrong when a man's heart has once gone a-straying. The question is, what else can we do?"

"We must have patience. Things may right themselves before long, and you must not bring an open scandal on the name of Chichester. Some day," she said with a downward glance, "some day you may have children to inherit it from you. Meanwhile——"

"Meanwhile, I suppose you are going to offer me your friendship as a stop-gap; after the manner of women, but I won't accept it from you."

"O! not my friendship," she cried impetuously, "but my love, Alan, my faithful and devoted love, to solace you, if it can solace you, under the trials you must pass through."

It sounded like a genuine outburst of feeling, and Sir Alan responded to it fervently. All remembrance of the pale, sickly wife at home faded from his mind, as he seized the hand of the ardent creature who rode beside him, and believed he had found a panacea against loneliness and disappointment.

"And *if*," he said, half bashfully, as though ashamed of saying it—as, after a mutual confession of regard and life-long fidelity, they rode on towards Battersby—"if it is ever possible for me to requite your goodness, Cora, and place you in the position you deserve, you *know*—do you not—that I shall do my duty by you?"

They jested and laughed with each other, after having arrived at so satisfactory a conclusion, much after the fashion of two newly engaged lovers, and every word that Cora Murray spoke seemed to rivet her chain still faster round Sir Alan Chichester. But, in the midst of their self-gratulation, the thought of his sister's remarks came like a cold douche.

"We shall have to be very, *very* careful," observed Cora, "for your sister *hates* me, Alan. I have told you so from the beginning. She watches my actions like a cat, and I am sure she meant a great deal more than she said in her remark this morning."

"She may say what she likes, my dear, so long as she doesn't carry her suspicions to Lady Chichester. Not that I think that my wife would believe her. You see, Alice has always been devoted to me; she thinks I am perfection, and incapable of doing wrong. Ah! well," continued Sir Alan, as a sudden sense of his treachery and ingratitude smote him between the joints of his armor, "it seems very strange that no amount of devotion should serve to keep a man straight when a creature like yourself comes along. What arts have you used to charm me, Cora? What sorceries have you used to blind my eyes and steel my heart against every woman but yourself? You are a regular witch, and I am at your feet, metaphorically and physically."

"But of what use is it, but to make us both wretched," she exclaimed, as though suddenly smitten with despair. "The years will roll on and bring us no nearer to one another. Would it not have been far better if we had never met?"

"They *shall* bring us nearer, my darling. They shall unite us for eternity. Why should we waste our lives in vain longing for each other? Yours has not been a happy life hitherto, Cora, from what you have told me, and mine was spoilt until you came to build it up again. Don't let us die of thirst when the goblet of love is close to our lips."

He looked at her eagerly for an answer, and she acquiesced, without a remonstrance, to his proposal.

"I suppose it is *Fate*," she sighed pensively, "and we really have no power to avert certain ends. Why should Mrs. Jolliffe have selected *me* from a dozen

candidates, and sent me down to Glebe Royal, instead of some woman whose heart was full of another—I, with my intense desire to be loved, to meet *you*, whose arms were empty? If it were not Fate, it is the working of some evil fiend whose object is to make us both more miserable than we were before."

"Say, rather of some angel, Cora, who took pity on our loneliness and brought us together for our mutual comfort. O! my darling, you have taken twenty years off my age to-day. I feel like a boy again, as I was when I— But we will not think of the past. We will talk only of the happy present and all the joy that may wait us in the future. And if the time should ever come when I can seal this contract and make you legally mine, you will trust me to do it, Cora, will you not?"

"I should indeed be unhappy if I thought you would fail in *that*, Alan, but I know you too well already to have any doubts upon the subject. But we are on the estate. Pray drop my hand lest we should meet some of your tenants."

"It is so hard to let it go," replied Sir Alan, as he pressed it firmly, "particularly now that I know it will some day be my own. Kiss me, Cora, and then we will consider the agreement signed and sealed."

He threw his arm about her waist, and drawing her towards him kissed her several times upon the lips. Kissing in lover's fashion is rather engrossing work for the time being, and it is difficult to do two things at once and to do them well. However that may be, this particular act of kissing lasted sufficiently long to enable a pedestrian to turn the corner of the

lane in which it occurred, and to witness it for herself. Indignation kept her silent during the proceeding, but she stood her ground manfully, with her umbrella stuck in the damp earth, as a support, and when Sir Alan and Cora Murray disengaged themselves at last, and prepared to settle down comfortably in their saddles again, they felt rather more startled than pleased to see Miss Chichester in the middle of the road staring at them.

CHAPTER XVI.

A PAIR OF CULPRITS.

IT was not possible to make any valid excuse for the close proximity in which they had been detected, but the instincts of her sex made Cora Murray immediately bend over her saddlebow, as though she had discovered something wrong with the reins, whilst Sir Alan shouted in a voice, which was intended to be perfectly at its ease :

“ Hullo, Anna! have you come out to welcome us home ? ”

But Miss Chichester vouchsafed no reply, except such as was conveyed by a violent snort of indignation, as she turned abruptly from them, and, entering the park by a side gate, commenced to stride rapidly in the direction of Glebe Royal.

The culprits glanced at one another in consternation, and then Cora tried to pass the matter off as a joke.

"I don't envy *you*, dear boy," she said, shaking her head archly at Sir Alan. "You're in for a scolding, there's no doubt of that. Miss Chichester will give you a *mauvais quart d'heure* as soon as you reach home."

But the baronet did not laugh.

"I wish that was to be the worst of it," he said moodily, "but I'm afraid our lucky star is not in the ascendant, Cora. What on earth can have induced Anna to walk in this direction? She generally stays at home all the morning."

"She came to look after us, there's no doubt of that," replied Miss Murray. "Didn't I tell you just now that her remark at breakfast time meant a great deal more than the mere words would imply?"

"Then it's all up with us," said the baronet.

"What do you mean?" she inquired with a startled air.

"I mean that she is quite capable of going straight to my wife with an account of what she has just seen, and you can guess what the consequence of that would be. It would half kill Alice. She believes so perfectly in my fidelity to her. There has never been any question about it through all these years, and if she heard of my folly now, just at this juncture when she is so ill—— My God! if anything happened to her through it, I should never forgive myself."

"*Your folly!*" repeated Miss Murray, frowning. "That is not very complimentary to *me*."

"O forgive me, Cora. You know what I mean. I love you, but I am married—I can't get out of that

fact—and my wife has no suspicion but that I am entirely her own in word and deed. If she thought otherwise I believe it would break her heart. Let us ride home as quickly as we can. I must see my sister before she has time to speak to Lady Chichester. Excuse my abruptness, but I am half distracted. And now, let us be off."

He did not say another word, but, putting spurs to his horse, set off at a smart gallop, in which she was fain to follow him, and did not draw rein until they had reached the portals of Glebe Royal. And then his first inquiry was, if Miss Chichester had returned home.

"Thank God!" he ejaculated when the answer was given in the negative, and as he lifted his hat to wipe the perspiration from his brow, Miss Murray saw that he had turned quite white with apprehension.

He lifted her from her horse, with the whisper, "in time, thank goodness," and immediately walked off to his wife's room.

Cora Murray looked after him with a pang of envy. She recognized—what so many women have done before her—that whatever a married man may say or do behind the back of his wife, she holds the first and only place in his interest directly there is a question concerning the honor of his house and name. The legal ties are the only unalienable ties after all, and even if a husband is faithless and unloving, the woman who bears his name stands as a queen on her own hearthstone, to warn off all intruders that may be distasteful to herself. Sir Alan

"bounced" into Lady Chichester's room, making her heart palpitate from the suddenness of his entrance, but the smile and the flush with which she welcomed him made him feel more guilty than a hundred reproaches could have had the power to do.

"How are you, my dear?" he said affectionately, as he quietly kissed her forehead.

"Much better, my darling, almost well," she answered brightly; "indeed I cannot imagine why Dr. Jolliffe should need a second opinion about me. Don't go to the expense of it, Alan. I am sure it is not necessary."

"But though you feel better, Alice, there is great room for improvement still, and it is only right we should have a first-rate opinion on your case at once. I gave Jolliffe permission yesterday to do just as he thinks fit."

"You think too much about me, my dearest husband," said the sick woman, as she turned her fragile little fingers between his. "I am not worth all this care on your part. Yet, if they could make me well again, strong enough to join in some of your amusements, and be your companion as I used to be, what happiness it would afford me." And she laid her lips upon his strong, nervous fingers as she spoke, and tenderly kissed them. Sir Alan drew his hand away almost roughly. The touch of those loving lips stung him like a snake.

"Yes, yes, darling," he said hurriedly, "have a little patience, and I am sure it will all be right by and by. I don't think Jolliffe thinks half so badly of your case as he used to do, in fact he looked so

sly about it yesterday that I accused him of being an old humbug, and only hanging about Glebe Royal in order to make up a fat Christmas bill."

Lady Chichester was still laughing in her quiet way at this very feeble little joke when the door opened, and Cora's glowing face appeared upon the threshold. She had changed her riding habit, and was ready to assume her usual duties, but when she perceived the baronet was present, she drew back.

"I didn't know Sir Alan was with you," she said apologetically, "I will come another time."

"No, no, Cora," exclaimed her ladyship, "come in at once, please. I have already been longing to see you. I have just been telling my dear husband that I feel *so* well. I half believe I could manage to get down to luncheon."

"O, that would be delightful," cried Miss Murray as she knelt on the hearthrug in front of Lady Chichester's chair. "Haven't I always told your ladyship that you would get quite strong some day, and live to be an old, *old* woman to make everybody happy around you!"

She looked so earnest as she uttered the pleasant prophecy, that Lady Chichester bent forward and kissed her forehead, and Cora responded eagerly to the embrace. There was something in that caress that repulsed Sir Alan. He rose at once, and telling his wife that, now she had her companion, he would go and look after his own business, he kissed her heartily, and prepared to leave the room. But as he approached the door, it opened again to admit Miss Chichester, attired in her rough tweed ulster

and "billycock" hat, just as she had come in from walking.

"O! you're *there*, are you?" she exclaimed, addressing her brother; "well, I want to speak to you, so come this way."

"Don't you say 'good-morning' to Alice?" he replied, in order to cover his retreat.

"*Good-morning to Alice,*" repeated his sister, "why, of course, I said good-morning to Alice hours ago. I don't walk out of the house directly my meals are over, and leave my manners behind me. But my business won't wait, so please come at once."

She stalked before him to her own sitting-room, and he followed, quietly apprehensive of the coming interview.

Miss Chichester's room was like herself, hard and uncompromising. She would have no such frivolities as birds or flowers to strew her carpet with litter, or distract her attention, and no easy chairs or sofas to encourage indolence. A case of forbidding-looking books in stern bindings, a sewing machine that was warranted to stitch leather, and a black writing-case that might have belonged to a solicitor's clerk, were the only appliances for use or pleasure that she allowed herself. All other articles came under the heading in her denomination of falfals, and were considered utterly unworthy of a sensible woman's consideration.

Miss Chichester closed the door of her room behind her with a bang, and motioning her brother to one of her black horse-hair chairs, sat down on another, with the air of a judge about to try a criminal.

"Well!" she commenced, "and what have you got to say for yourself?"

Sir Alan felt as if he were once more the little boy of ten years old, who used to stand trembling when detected in an offence by his tall sister of twenty, as he replied:

"About what you saw take place in Horseman Lane just now? Well, it was an accident, that's all."

Miss Chichester glared at him like a dragon.

"*An accident!* How dare you tell me such a falsehood! I catch a married man kissing a hussy on the sly, and he tells me it was an accident. Faugh!"

"You shall *not* call Miss Murray by that name," returned the baronet, hotly.

"I shall call her by what name I choose, sir, and she may think herself lucky that I don't have her turned out of the house altogether. And if it wasn't for Alice I would."

"Anna, you will not say anything about the matter before Alice," he said imploringly.

"No, I shall not, but not for your sake, or Miss Murray's—for I'd like to see you both whipped at a cart's tail—but for Alice herself. Why, it would kill the poor girl. I'm disgusted with you."

"I'm not sure that I'm not disgusted with myself," said Sir Alan humbly, "but it would be difficult to explain to you, Anna, the temptations that assail a man. One might not think of such a thing unless the opportunity occurred, but when one is placed in juxtaposition with a very pretty woman, one may happen to forget oneself."

"Pretty fiddlesticks," cried Miss Chichester. "I never could see the pleasure of kissing myself, but if you must kiss somebody, haven't you got Alice and me?"

He was too nervous even to laugh.

"I forgot Alice for the time being, I acknowledge, and I am very sorry for it. But it shall not happen again, Anna. I will place a better guard over myself for the future."

"I hope you will, and give up riding about lonely lanes with that hussy. And what are you going to do about her, pray? Is she to remain in this house after having outraged my feelings in that abandoned manner?"

"What alternative do you propose? We can't send Miss Murray away from Glebe Royal without causing great annoyance, if not danger, to Alice. You know how she depends on her for everything. I believe it would throw her back altogether if she were to lose her now."

"You're right, Alan, and I wonder what it would do for Alice to be made aware of your infidelity to her."

"Don't talk of it. You know I would save her from the knowledge at any cost."

"You won't have to be faithful to her long—that's my opinion."

"Anna, what *do* you mean?"

"Just what I say. That fool Jolliffe can't make head or tail of her case, and has to call in another fool to help him. That is why I walked towards Horseman Lane to meet you this morning. He

came here directly after you had left to say he had received a telegram from the London doctor to say he would be down at Glebe Royal at three o'clock this afternoon."

"So soon! I had no idea Jolliffe would be so prompt, though I gave him leave yesterday to act in the matter as he thought fit. Anna, why is a consultation necessary? Is there going to be an operation, or anything dreadful of that sort?"

"I don't know, but I fear so. There's evidently something altogether wrong. Any fool could see that for himself."

"My poor wife! How will she stand it, so frail and delicate as she has always been! The very prospect will be enough to kill her, O Anna, I have been very wrong. I have forgotten lately how much poor Alice has suffered in the past, how soon we may be parted in the future. But believe me, I have been only thoughtless, not wicked, and if God spares her to me, I will never do anything again that I should be ashamed to go and tell her."

"That's what you men always say. Out of sight is out of mind with you. But I'm glad you feel so, Alan. I should have been very much ashamed of my brother if he had not, for there's no doubt about it that Alice is very ill, and this afternoon will decide the matter, one way or the other."

Sir Alan sat for a few minutes with his face in his hands, thinking, and then he said sadly:

"I feel as if there were a death in the house already. I dread the arrival of this specialist. I shall feel like a man about to be hung whilst he is

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making his decision. But, whatever it may be, whether for life or death, I shall take Alice away, Anna, to Mentone or Italy, and spend a few months with her alone. Don't you think it will be a good plan? The business of the estate and the kennels occupy one so."

"If the doctors will let you," said his sister grimly, "but her disease may not admit of traveling. However, we mustn't meet trouble half way. Let us wait and hear what they have to say for themselves. And I must go and tell the cook to have a meal of some sort prepared for the fool who has to go back to London. Fifty pounds for just coming down to look at a woman. Ridiculous! And when I dare say he doesn't know any more about it than I do."

And in her indignation at the specialist's fee, Miss Chichester left the room without discharging another shaft at the head of Cora Murray.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN UNMITIGATED SURPRISE.

THAT was a very dull and portentous morning at Glebe Royal. Sir Alan sat in the library, smoking moodily, and glancing every now and then at the clock to see how the time went. Miss Chichester shut herself up in her own room, and refused to discuss the subject of the approaching consultation with anyone. Even the servants (who dearly loved their gentle little mistress) were infected with the general depression, and spoke in whispers as they met on the landings. And, worst of all, Lady Chichester herself, who had been so unusually bright and cheerful that morning, took alarm as soon as she was told that the specialist had really been telegraphed for, and remained in her dressing-room, a mute picture of misery, patiently awaiting the dreaded arrival of the doctors.

Miss Murray was the only one who held up under the circumstances, and calmed Lady Chichester's fears by so many cheerful and sensible arguments that Alice said—both at the time, and afterwards—that she did not know what she would have done without her. The great specialist came punctually to his appointment. He valued his time at so much a minute, and could not afford to get behind-hand with his engagements. Dr. Jolliffe went down to the

station in the baronet's carriage to meet his celebrated *confrère*. Sir Alan went into the hall to receive him when he reached Glebe Royal. Dr. Mark Norman was a middle-aged man, bald, short-sighted and serious-looking, as befitted one whose life was spent in pronouncing the doom of his fellow creatures. He bowed gravely in return to the baronet's salutation, and refused to take any of the refreshments provided for him.

"No need, I assure you, Sir Alan. I lunched before starting. A glass of wine afterwards perhaps, but nothing at present. With your leave, I will ask Dr. Jolliffe to conduct me at once to our patient. I conclude she is ready to receive me."

"Quite ready, Dr. Norman. This young lady, Miss Murray, who is her companion, will show you the way to her room."

And then he waved his hand towards Cora Murray, who stood on the staircase, and with a face the color of ashes walked back into his study and resigned himself to be miserable.

Miss Murray, having tripped upstairs before the doctors, and ushered them into the presence of Lady Chichester, who was as white as a lily with apprehension, descended to the library again, with a view to consoling the baronet. She found him sitting in a chair, with his arms thrown out over the table, and his head pressed down against them, as though he would fain have shut out every sound that might reach him from the upper rooms. Cora walked up to his side and laid her hand upon his arm.

"Now, Sir Alan, I will not have you anticipate evil. Hope for the best, the London doctor's opinion may be quite different from what we expect."

"Please go away," he answered, without raising his head. "I wish to be alone."

It was a decided rebuff, but she would not accept it as such.

"You mustn't speak to me like *that*, dear," she whispered, softly, as she laid her head against his own; "have you forgotten that I love you, and should never urge you to anything unless I thought it was for your good?"

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, jumping up suddenly, and beginning to walk up and down the room. "Can't you see how I am suffering? My brain is on fire. Leave me to myself, for goodness sake, until this miserable suspense is ended one way or the other."

"And don't you think that *I* must suffer too?" she asked, with a faltering voice.

"I don't know. I know nothing, except that my wife's fate is in the balance—that her life is perhaps at stake—and I have no heart to remember anything else. Don't worry me any longer."

"O! indeed, then I think it must be time for me to go," replied Miss Murray, with an offended air as she left the room. But the baronet did not heed her mood, nor her departure. He wanted nothing at that moment except for the harrowing suspense in which he was plunged to be over, and to hear for certain what he had to contend against in the future, and whether Alice would live or die. As he sat

there mute and motionless, or stalked up and down the library floor in agony of waiting, the thought of his wife, as she had been when he married her—a tender, delicate girl—kept recurring to his mind, and making him shudder as he dreaded what might lie before her now, that dainty, fragile darling whom once he had almost worshipped. His sister looked in upon him occasionally, but she brought him no comfort. The two medical men were closeted with Lady Chichester and Jane Wood. They would allow no one else in the room, and she had been unable to gather anything from listening at the door. They seemed very quiet, they were not talking much, she did not think there could be anything very serious.

"But perhaps the case needs no discussion. It may be too pre-evident," argued the unhappy husband, "and they are afraid to tell us the truth too suddenly."

"Nonsense," exclaimed his more strong-minded sister. "Do you suppose they'd care a pin for our feelings, when their time is their money? We *must* have the truth, sooner or later, and to my mind the sooner the better. But hark! They have opened the door, and are coming downstairs. Now, Alan, my dear," she continued, clapping him suddenly on the back, "be a man and bear whatever they may have to tell you bravely."

The baronet stood up at once, and dashed his hand across his eyes. Englishmen are so falsely ashamed of being detected in giving way to anything like sentiment or emotion, even though the cause may be an honorable one. But his face twitched visibly

as the medical men entered the room together, and carefully closed the door behind them.

"You have arrived at some conclusion, I hope," he said, with a sickly smile, as they approached him, "and—and—I should be glad to learn what it is as quickly as possible."

"Pray don't pull such a long face about it, Sir Alan!" exclaimed Dr. Jolliffe, smiling, "we do not bring you bad news by any manner of means."

"Not bad news?" he echoed, faintly.

"I think not, Dr. Norman—eh, sir?"

"I think not," reiterated Dr. Norman.

Sir Alan sat down again.

"Pray let me hear the worst or the best at once," he said, "you do not know the suspense I have been suffering."

"Of course, of course, naturally," replied the great specialist, slowly rubbing his hands. "Well, I am happy to be able to assure you, Sir Alan, that our fears (in one direction at least) are unfounded. My good friend here, Dr. Jolliffe, was led to imagine (or rather I should say to fear), from a course of symptoms which might portend very different issues, but which from various circumstances connected with the case he was quite justified in supposing pointed to a certain end, that her ladyship might have to undergo a very serious operation."

"Yes, yes, yes," responded the baronet, feverishly, "but what is your own opinion?"

"Dr. Norman is coming to that—eh, sir?" interposed Dr. Jolliffe, still broadly smiling.

"Certainly," replied the great authority, evidently not over pleased at the interruption. "Under these

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circumstances, Sir Alan, my friend, Dr. Jolliffe, although he had really made up his mind respecting Lady Chichester's condition, considered it advisable to have a second opinion, before he made the truth known to yourself."

"And Dr. Norman, I am happy to say, entirely coincides with my own views on the matter," said Dr. Jolliffe.

"Certainly! There is not the least doubt about it."

"Yes, yes—" repeated the impatient husband, "and your decision, doctor?"

"My decision agrees with Dr. Jolliffe's previous opinion, Sir Alan, that Lady Chichester's symptoms are all dependent upon one cause. She is about to make you at no very distant period—a father."

The baronet dropped into his chair as if he had been shot.

"What?" he exclaimed, incredulously.

"A father," repeated Dr. Jolliffe, seizing him by the hand; "my dear Sir Alan, I would have told it you weeks ago, had I not been so much afraid of raising hopes, only to disappoint them again. But now, let me congratulate you on the happy event. I know it is the one thing needed to make your married life complete, and, please God, you will see it realized before three months are over your head."

The baronet stared at him in a dazed fashion for a few moments, and then, dragging his hand away, hid his face from view and gave vent to his emotion unseen.

Miss Chichester was almost as affected as her brother.

" You are *sure*," she cried, excitedly, " that you know what you are talking about, Dr. Jolliffe. This is not some mare's nest of your own finding, I hope. I suppose you know Alice's age? She was forty last birthday, and it isn't often women begin to have families at that time. You wouldn't trifle with such a subject, I hope, and make us believe there's an heir coming to Glebe Royal when it's all moonshine."

" I can't swear it will be an *heir*, Miss Chichester," said the doctor. " But heir or heiress, it is coming sure enough, and I see no reason why it shouldn't be followed by two or three more. Anyway, it's the truth, and the sooner you begin to make the bibs and tuckers the better."

" God bless her," exclaimed Miss Chichester, fervently. " I'll forgive her everything she's ever done after this."

" She's never done anything that requires forgiveness," said the baronet, brightly, as he stood up and tried to pull himself together. " We owe you incalculable thanks, Dr. Norman, for this unexpected and wonderful piece of news. It would be impossible for me to tell you what I feel at its reception. It will transform the whole of my future life. But you must be ready now for a little refreshment. Pray come into the dining-room. And I feel as if a brandy and soda would do me no harm," he continued, slapping his chest, as though to assure himself that he was really awake.

" A glass of wine, Sir Alan—nothing but a glass of wine," replied Dr. Norman, looking at his watch, for I must catch the five o'clock train."

"The carriage is waiting to come round whenever you may order it," replied the baronet.

"At once then, my dear sir—at once," said the specialist, and five minutes after he had pocketed his fee (Sir Alan had never written a cheque with such heartfelt pleasure before), shaken hands all round, and driven off to the station.

As soon as he was gone, the baronet looked at his old friend again with humid eyes.

"Jolliffe," he said, "can it really be true? I feel as if I were in a dream. To have suffered such a torture of suspense on her account, and then to be told that it will end in that, of which we had given up all hope years and years ago! It is incredible."

"I daresay it seems so to you, Sir Alan, but nevertheless it is true. But now I must give you a caution. You mustn't make too much of it before Lady Chichester. I cannot have her excited. Let her be peacefully and calmly happy, and all will go well."

"Does she know it? Did you tell her?"

"Certainly! the very first thing. She would have died of fright else."

"And how did she take it, Jolliffe?"

"Very much like yourself. I don't think she believed it at first, but she does now."

"I must go to her. My poor Alice! To think that all her patience and her suffering should be rewarded like this."

"It will be a reward indeed. Fancy a fine, stout, little fellow riding over the estate on his pony by your side, Sir Alan. It won't be long first, you know, and I shouldn't be in the least surprised, as I told

your sister just now, if he had four or five little brothers and sisters coming after him. Lady Chichester having commenced to walk in the right way, may go on triumphantly to the end."

And Dr. Jolliffe laughed uproariously at his own wit, in which the baronet was quite ready to join him.

"Alan!" exclaimed Miss Chichester, suddenly, "we must call him 'Geoffry' after our father. I won't have any other name, unless you like to add your own to it."

"It's rather early to decide upon his name," replied her brother, smiling.

"I don't know that. Everything will have to be marked, you know. I suppose you don't intend the heir to Glebe Royal to come into the world without a shirt to his back. However, you men know nothing about such things."

"I only know one thing now, Anna, that I am happier than I ever expected to be, and I must go and tell my Alice so. Good-bye, Jolliffe, and God bless you. You won't see me again this afternoon."

He ran upstairs as he spoke, and encountered Miss Murray on the landing.

"Have the doctors gone?" she inquired, with a long face, "and what is their verdict? I hope—I *hope* it is not so bad as we expected, Sir Alan."

Her appearance brought back an unpleasant memory with it, but he was too overjoyed to feel vexed, even with himself.

"It's not bad at all," he answered, smiling, "in fact, we're all delighted with it. Go and ask Miss Chichester."

"Cannot I accompany you to her ladyship's room? She may require my services."

"No, no, not now. She requires no one but me, and we do not wish to be disturbed," he said, as he dashed past her to his wife's room, and left her standing there with a deep frown upon her brow.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RENEWAL OF HAPPINESS.

LADY CHICHESTER, robed in a pale-tinted gown, that suited her delicate appearance, and with a French lace cap on her head, was seated before the fire, lost in a blissful reverie, whilst Jane Wood, with a look of proud importance on her face, was moving the articles on the toilet table in a vague manner, as if she didn't half know what she was doing.

"Now, didn't I always tell your ladyship that things would come right some day," she was saying; "and so they would have done, years and years ago, if you would only have taken your poor old nurse's advice."

But here she was interrupted in her exordium by the entrance of Sir Alan, who rushed in like an impetuous school-boy, and throwing himself at his wife's feet, clasped both his arms around her figure. Jane Wood needed no hint that she had better leave them to themselves. She just gave a glance at the baronet's attitude, and hobbled off into the next room, with her old eyes filled with tears.

"Alice!" exclaimed Sir Alan, as soon as they were alone together, "Alice! my own dear wife."

Lady Chichester looked at the glowing eyes raised to her face, and read in them an expression which she had not seen for years. It seemed as if the weary

interval had magically slidden away, and they were once more a boy and girl, madly in love with each other and looking forward to a life of unmitigated happiness, and her new-found joy could only find vent in tears, as she replied :

"O Alan! I am so thankful."

"*Thankful*, dear! Thankful is no name for it. I am half-intoxicated with this sudden news. After having dreaded the suffering that might lie before you, to hear that it is to end in this supreme happiness is almost too much. And the surprise of it has taken my breath away. And so this wary hoping, and waiting, and being disappointed is to have its reward at last. What do you think of it, Alice?"

"What do *I* think of it, my darling husband? That I would die a thousand deaths sooner than it should not take place. Fancy a child of our very, *very* own. A baby with my darling's hair, and eyes, and mouth. O! I cannot believe it. It is too good to be true."

"And you have never suspected the truth, Alice?"

"Never! It has been as complete a revelation to me as to yourself. But Dr. Norman says there is not the slightest doubt of it, and if I were not in such delicate health, I should have discovered it long ago. But I was so persuaded that I had some terrible disease that would eventually end my life, Alan, that my thoughts never wandered in any other direction."

"We have been a set of ignorant boobies, Alice, but we shall be wiser next time, eh, my darling?"

His happy, confident manner and affectionate tones brought a flush into Lady Chichester's face, and a sparkle to her eye, that seemed to take ten years off her age at once.

"O Alan!" she sighed, "I'm afraid I don't deserve such a blessing, for I have been very wicked sometimes. I have almost blamed the Almighty for withholding from me what every other woman seemed to enjoy, and I have envied the mothers I met, until the rest of my life has not seemed worth having to me. And sometimes—sometimes—"

"Sometimes *what*, my Alice?" inquired the baronet, who was rather calmer by this time, and had taken a seat by her side.

"You mustn't be angry with me, Alan, for saying so, for I know it was only my own wicked feelings that prompted the idea, but sometimes I have even fancied that you had wearied of me, because I had borne you no children, and had fallen into such a stupid state of health that I could go about with you nowhere, and that when you looked at other women, younger and stronger than myself, you remembered the disappointment I had been to you, and almost wished that it was all over, and you could choose again. I only fancied it you know, darling," continued Lady Chichester, timidly, as she watched her husband's head droop lower at her words. "I knew that you were far too good and kind to dream of such a thing in reality, only a wife who has no children feels herself to be a mistake, and cannot help thinking that others must feel the same."

Sir Alan could not answer the tender, little appeal for some moments, his guilty conscience rapped so loudly at the door, and when he did, he carefully avoided treading over the same ground.

"My dearest Alice," he said, "do you remember

the day I brought you home to Glebe Royal as my wife?"

"Remember it! O Alan! Do you think I have forgotten a single thing that took place at that time, though it is twenty years ago?"

"Twenty years ago," he repeated; "we might, had Heaven pleased, had a son as tall as myself by this time, but we shall love the rascal all the more, dear, for having kept us waiting for so long. Twenty years ago! What a sweet, fair, tender darling you were then, and how I worshipped you! Do you think such love can fade in reality? I know that, as the years go on, and we grow accustomed to the blessings of this life, we are apt to make less of them, but it is only in seeming, Alice. The chance of losing them makes us aware how dear they are to us still, as the dread of to-day's consultation made me feel about you. Don't talk to me again as you did just now, it hurts me terribly. I have not been so good a husband to you as I should, perhaps, but I have never really wanted any other woman but yourself. And for the future, I don't know how I shall be able to make enough of you. We will think that we have just been married, my darling, and starting on life's journey together."

Lady Chichester clasped her little hand tightly in that of her husband. She didn't know how to express all that she felt for him.

"I have left you too much to yourself," continued Sir Alan, "because I thought you were too weak to take any interest in my sports or occupations. But I will do so no longer. If you cannot go out with

me, we will stay at home together. You shall never have to complain of my inattention again."

"O Alan! I never *have* complained of it," exclaimed Alice, earnestly, "and it would be most selfish of me to wish to keep you indoors because my strength will not permit me to go out. I will not hear of it. Dr. Norman says I am to continue my drives and walks as usual, and to lie on the sofa as little as possible, and there is always Cora to go with me. Dear Cora, she has been so good to me to-day, keeping up my spirits till the doctors came. I don't know what I should have done without her. Does she know the great news, Alan? Have you told her?"

"No. I only saw her for a minute on the staircase as I came up to your room. But she is not one of ourselves, Alice. It is no business of hers, though doubtless all Glebe Royal will know it before night. Anna is nearly crazy with delight at the prospect of an heir, and old Jane seems the same."

"Poor old Jane cried like a child when she heard the doctor's decision. She has always sympathized so much in my disappointment. But I should like dear Cora to know it, I am sure she will be glad, for my sake and your's."

"Well, we can hardly expect Miss Murray to feel like ourselves on the subject, particularly as the advent of the little stranger will, I suppose, sound the keynote of her own departure. Don't you think you could dispense with her services now, Alice? I intend to be your companion for the future, and drive and walk with you, and I really don't see what use Miss Murray will be under the circumstances."

Lady Chichester's eyes beamed with delight at her husband's proposition, but she would not consent to part with her companion.

"Send Cora away, dear Alan, and just now when we are all so happy? O! that would be unkind to both her and me. I want Cora for a thousand little things that you can't do for me. Fancy, my asking a dear, old, blundering darling like you to sort my silks and wools, or write my letters, and read aloud to me. It would make us both miserable. No, dear Alan, you must not ask me to part with Cora, for she has become quite necessary to me. She is just like a younger sister, and no one, not even you, could fill her place. And just now, too, when my mind will be full of all the preparations I must make for this wonderful event, I shall want her advice and her assistance more than ever."

"But afterwards, Alice—when you have the baby—you won't want her *then* surely? Is she to be a fixture in the house for ever?"

"No, perhaps not *afterwards*," said his wife in a dreamy tone, and then, as though waking up, she continued, more briskly, "Don't let us talk of *afterwards*, Alan. The present is enough happiness for me. The future seems almost too much."

At this juncture Miss Chichester asked for admittance at the door. Her speech was rough and *brusque* as usual, but there was an evident feeling underlying it that robbed it of any power to wound.

"Well, Alice, my dear," she said, with a fierce peck at her sister-in-law's cheek, "and so you're going to do your duty at last. I'm very glad to hear

it. Glebe Royal won't be the same place when we have a son and heir scampering all over it. I have told Alan he must be called 'Geoffry' after our father, and you mustn't try and persuade him out of it. It will be *our* child, you know, a great deal more than yours. It will be a Chichester, with *our* nose, most likely, and *our* mouth—at least I sincerely hope so—and so you mustn't get any absurd ideas into your head about his belonging to *your* family, and give him a lot of names that the Chichesters never heard of."

"Dear Anna," replied Lady Chichester, smiling, "I care for nothing so long as he comes, and you and Alan may call him what you like."

"But I won't have Alice worried on that or any other subject," exclaimed the baronet, rising; "you remember what Jolliffe said, Anna, that she is not to be excited. And now, my darling, what do you wish to do this evening? Are you too tired to come down into the dining-room, and shall I send your dinner up here?"

"By no means, Alan. Directly I heard the good news, my sickness seemed to fall from me like a mantle. I know what it all means now. I have no longer any fears to contend against, and I shall grow stronger every day. If you will leave me to Anna and Jane for half an hour, I will change my dress in time for dinner."

He kissed and left her, still buoyantly pleased, but yet already sufficiently accustomed to the event looming in the future to enable him to feel a great deal of annoyance at what had occurred between

himself and Cora Murray. How could he have been such a fool, he kept on asking himself, as the unpleasant memory cropped up in his mind, and above all, what attitude could he assume towards her now? To continue the course of folly he had so thoughtlessly begun, with the revulsion of feeling he had experienced, was impossible to him, for if Sir Alan Chichester was a weak man, he was not a wicked one. His affection for his wife had been deadened, not destroyed, and her new prospects had revived it in a measure which astonished himself. He had not proved strong enough to resist the temptation offered by a very charming woman bent upon his conquest, but he was not prepared to carry on a double game when his fault had become apparent to him, and, strange to say, all desire to do so had suddenly evaporated. He could think of nothing but the promised heir, and the want of gratitude he had shown to her who was the mother of it. Had it been feasible, he would have sent Cora Murray away from Glebe Royal then and there, and never seen her again. But it was not feasible, Alice strongly objected to the proposal. She loved her young friend, and would not consent to part with her unless for some stringent reason. And Cora would not be, he imagined, incapable of taking her revenge, if dismissed in order to conceal his misdoings. She was a clever woman. She would guess the cause, and might even reveal it to Lady Chichester. His treachery to his wife might revolve on his own head by injuring her, and perhaps even the long-expected heir. No, it was impossible. At all risks, Miss Mur-

ray must remain at Glebe Royal until Lady Chichester herself consented to her departure, and meanwhile he must keep the peace with both women. It was an unpleasant predicament to be placed in, but, so far as Sir Alan could see, it was unavoidable. The only plan to be pursued was to behave cordially to Miss Murray on all occasions, and carefully to avoid being left alone with her. Acting on this principle, the baronet entering the library a minute afterwards, and seeing the lady sitting there with a book, smiled pleasantly, and said,

"Of course you've heard the grand news, that we are to have bonfires and bell-ringings in Glebe Royal before we're many months older, eh? A wonderful ending to all our apprehensions, isn't it? I suppose the little hamlet will go off its head when the event really occurs."

"Yes, if it does," replied Miss Murray, without raising her eyes from her book.

The baronet's face fell.

"But why should you say *that?*"

"Not to frighten you, you may depend on it. But these events are always uncertain you know, and her ladyship's health is so delicate that I should not like to make *too* sure, for fear of a disappointment."

"But Jolliffe says she will get stronger every day now," said Sir Alan, irresolutely.

"Will she? I am very glad to hear it," replied Miss Murray, still intent on her book.

The baronet saw he was not yet forgiven for his *brusque* behavior of the morning, and, turning on his heel, left the apartment without another word.

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CHAPTER XIX.

BETWEEN TWO FIRES.

WHEN Sir Alan met his wife again, radiant in the pride of her new position, his temporary annoyance vanished, and he found it an easy task to make himself generally agreeable at the dinner table. But when he joined the ladies in the drawing-room, and Lady Chichester seemed to expect him to renew the devotion he had exhibited towards her during the afternoon, under the very eyes of Cora Murray, the baronet commenced to feel shy. He sat at the foot of his wife's sofa, it is true, playing with the ribbons of her dress, whilst he conversed with her in a low tone, but he felt very guilty when Miss Murray suddenly turned round and detected him holding Lady Chichester's hand, or looking in her eyes as if he loved her. Poor Alice had no idea why he should jerk his hand away without any visible reason and color like a school-boy as he lowered his gaze, but her husband felt very uncomfortable all the same, and as if he were placed between two fires, at one of which he was sooner or later to be well roasted. He stood his ground, however, manfully, until Lady Chichester expressed a desire to move, and then he insisted upon accompanying her to her own room, and seeing her safely delivered into the hands of Jane Wood.

He was congratulating himself, as he came downstairs again, that he had escaped the inevitable roasting, at least for that night, and would have a little more time to consider how he should get out of the scrape he found himself in, when he ran straight up against Miss Murray with her handkerchief held to her eyes. The sight struck him with remorse. Bright, vivacious, high-spirited Cora Murray *weeping!* It seemed incredible, and yet his conscience told him *who* was the author of her grief, and he felt it would be unmanly, nay, brutal, to leave her in such a predicament without inquiring the cause. So he stopped short, and said,

"Cora! what ails you? What is the matter?"

"O! leave me, leave me," she replied, passing by him to her little sitting-room on the landing, "it is the only thing you can do now."

But the words seemed like a challenge to follow, and accordingly he entered with her, and closed the door behind them. Miss Murray sank into a chair and began sobbing in real earnest with mingled mortification and anger.

"Don't cry, pray don't cry, Miss Chichester may hear you," the baronet kept repeating, as he stood by her side and essayed to dry her tears. But Cora dashed the handkerchief away.

"Why should you care?" she exclaimed passionately, "whether I cry or not? What is it to you? Go back to your wife and leave me to myself. I am nobody in your estimation now."

"You are very much mistaken," replied Sir Alan, soothingly. "I esteem and admire you as much as

ever I did, and I am glad to have an opportunity to tell you so. For I feel that I have done you an injury, Cora, for which I ought to ask your pardon, and I hope you will grant it to me."

"I don't understand you, Sir Alan."

"I mean that I should never have spoken to you as I did this morning, that my feelings got the better of my discretion, and I took a mean advantage of the position I found myself in. I owe you an apology for the affront, and I tender it humbly. Will you forgive me?"

Miss Murray raised her face from the shelter of her hands, and gazed at him fixedly.

"Then you didn't mean what you said?" she exclaimed; "you were trying to make a fool of me, Sir Alan?"

"No, no. How can you think so basely of me?"

"If your words were true, why apologize for them?"

"Because words, even if true, are often better left unsaid. Because, since they can never be anything *but* words, it was a cruelty both to you and myself to utter them, and I am ashamed to think I had not more control over my feelings."

"You have certainly changed your opinion in many respects since this morning. *Then*, if I remember rightly, I was an angel, sent by heaven to console you in your loneliness. *Now*, you have the prospect of being no longer lonely, and the angel is not needed. Is not that the real truth, Sir Alan?"

Her sarcasm stung him to the quick.

"By heavens! no, Cora. You do me a great injustice. I was very imprudent, but I meant every

word I said. I do not know how to thank you sufficiently for the interest you were good enough to express in me, but can I take advantage of it? Can I break up my home, desert my wife and child, and make my name a scandal in the county, and all in order to ruin an innocent girl like you? It is impossible."

Cora laughed softly at this tirade.

"Certainly not, Sir Alan, and I don't think we talked of such a thing, did we? However, I quite understand your change of tactics. You have had a new motive presented to you for being moral, and all other considerations fly before it, like chaff before the wind."

"Do you blame me for it?" he responded eagerly. "This morning I seemed to have no one but myself to think of, and a frail life that the first breath might blow away. To-night, I feel that I am already a father, awaiting an event that will bring me an heir to my title and estates, a son for me to bring up and live for, and probably transform my wife from an invalid into a healthy woman. Don't you see how it changes my whole existence at one stroke, and makes me feel that I am bound to live a sober and respectable life for the future?"

"Precisely. I *do* see it, and that it has changed your sentiments for me into the bargain. However, they can never have been very strong, if a breath can blow them away."

She cast her fine eyes upward as she spoke, and the glamour of her beauty fell upon him again like an evil spell. He knelt down by her side and threw his arms around her slender waist.

"There you are wrong," he said. "What I felt for you this morning, I feel now, and shall never cease to feel. But I dare not be so open in expressing it. A great issue is at stake for me. The continuation of my name and title depends in a manner on my wife's peace of mind, and I must do nothing to upset it. You saw what a risk we ran this morning. If this piece of news had not turned all our prospects topsy-turvy, I verily believe that my sister would have carried the story to my wife. Judge what such a discovery would do for her now. It would kill her and my child into the bargain. Be merciful, Cora, and make some allowances for a man's ambition and desire for posterity."

"I should care for nothing," she whispered into his ear, "if I only felt *sure* that you spoke the truth when you said you loved me."

"Then, care for nothing," he answered, kissing her, "for I *did* speak the truth. Could I have my own way at this moment I know where it would lead me. But we must be satisfied with the secret knowledge of our mutual regard, Cora, for there must be no further open expression of it. It is too dangerous, both for you and for me."

"Perhaps you would prefer that I should leave Glebe Royal," she said with a sigh.

"No, no, don't think of it. Besides, Alice wouldn't part with you for all the world. You must stay and help me in my work. Be her friend, Cora, and keep her mind peaceful and at rest, and you will be doing me the greatest possible favor."

"*I have been her friend,*" replied Miss Murray weeping. "*I have never omitted to do or say any-*

thing that I thought would please her, and I have borne with all Miss Chichester's coolness and affronts without answering a word, because—because—I loved you, Alan."

How soothing it is to a man's self-esteem to know that two or more women are simply prostrate at his feet in silent adoration. It puts him on such good terms with himself that he cannot help pitying the owners of the affection that is lavished upon him, and feeling that he is in duty bound to offer them some consolation. More, the very fact of knowing he is beloved is pretty sure to work up an answering passion in his inflammable nature, until he is not sure himself which one of them all he is really in love with. Sir Alan Chichester was a very simple-hearted country gentleman. He had never mixed in the world of fashion and dissipation, and the free and easy manner in which the husbands of the nineteenth century trample on all their marital obligations was a sealed book to him. He had been terribly ashamed all day of the imprudence of which he had been guilty during the morning ride, but as Cora Murray sobbed out her confession of love to him, he felt that he owed her something in return.

"I *know* you have," he replied emphatically; "you have been the best and dearest friend Alice has ever had, except myself, and no one is better aware of it than she is. But I want you to be *my* friend too, Cora. I want you to help me to take care of her, and to ward off all annoyances from her, until this expected event is over, and you don't know how I shall love you in return. Is it a bargain?"

He thought that, by claiming her friendship **equally** for himself and Lady Chichester, he was placing a barrier between any warmer feeling on their part, and that the woman to whom he had vowed a passionate love would be content to aid his kindly offices for his wife without any sinister intention in doing so. Cora Murray saw through the baronet's design, and smiled at its futility. But at the same time she was too clever not to accede to it. A refusal on her part at this juncture would have caused an irreparable rupture between them. The object to be gained was to remain by Sir Alan Chichester's side. If she could not effect *that*, she might as well throw up the sponge altogether. And so she put out her hand and said, "It *is* a bargain!" and the baronet raised it to his lips and kissed it gratefully. But as he was about to take his leave and creep cautiously from the room, Cora gazed at him, and he came back again immediately and kissed her warmly on the lips. When the door had closed after him, she laughed derisively to herself.

"Friendship! my dear baronet! Yes, that's just the sort of friendship you'd like to have with me," she thought. "Now, I wonder if it's worth my while to keep it up with you. This sudden fit of morality is all moonshine; still, if her ladyship intends to live and bring you a family, there'll be no room here for me, I see that plainly enough. My sympathy and affection was wanted to fill up a gap, but if an heir comes, you'll be too proud of your paternity to risk his name or your own."

"Now the question is, will your prospective heir

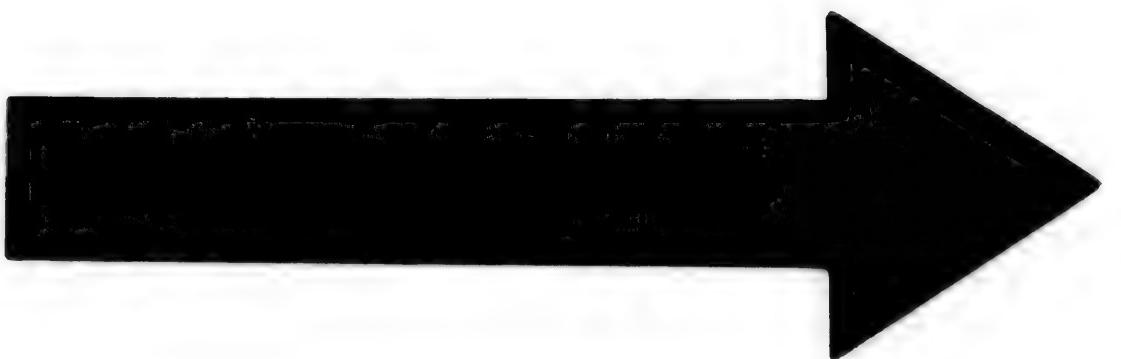
become a certainty? I should say the chances are against it. Her ladyship's age and her extreme delicacy are not in her favor. And meanwhile Masham's at the antipodes, and Fauntleroy's at Gibraltar, and I cannot do better than stay on here and keep your lukewarm affection simmering, until I see how events turn out. You're like a Kitchener's range. I can always bring you up to the boiling heat directly I see fit to do so."

Having arrived at this conclusion, Miss Murray set to work to behave herself in the most decorous manner, attending closely to Lady Chichester's wants, and only reminding the baronet by an occasional sigh or love-lorn glance that she had ever thought of him in any way but a patron and a friend. Her clever tactics threw them all off their guard, and especially the man for whom they were intended. He became at his ease, and confident in his own stability at once. In truth, it only required a little reserve on her part to make him so. He knew he had been wrong, and he regretted his weakness, but, like many others, he had not the strength of mind to fight openly with the partner of his folly. He wanted to keep the peace with both women until Cora Murray should be out of the way, an end which he was determined to accomplish as soon as it could be accomplished with safety to his wife. Meanwhile, Lady Chichester clung to her young companion with an unbounded confidence that would have been very touching to any one that knew the position which they held towards each other. She had become so quietly happy, and even

merry under the influence of her renewed happiness, that she chatted all day, like a rippling water, of the past, the present and the future, and laid her innocent heart bare for the edification or ridicule of her hearers. She never tired in those days of telling Cora about Sir Alan's courtship, of how they first met, and what he said, and how soon he proposed. And then the marriage festivities were retailed, and old Jane Wood's memory was called into requisition to relate how many guests were present, and what the wedding feast consisted of, and what was said of the bride, and what of the bridegroom. And Lady Chichester even went so far as to produce certain little love letters, written both before and after marriage, and to read out all their "darlings" and "dearests" and "own beloveds" for the edification of her companion, whose face would turn livid with envy and contempt behind the broad smile with which she received her ladyship's confidences.

"But perhaps I am boring you, dear Cora," Alice would exclaim after a while, "and you will think me awfully silly to talk so much to you about Alan, and what he said and did so many years ago. But then I am not quite like other women, you know. I never had another lover but Alan. He was my first and last, and I have no one else to talk about. And now, you know, I am sure you will understand that he seems dearer to me than ever. This has been the only thing that was wanted to make our married life *perfect*.

"I shall never envy anyone again upon earth, and I should say just the same if I knew that the day of



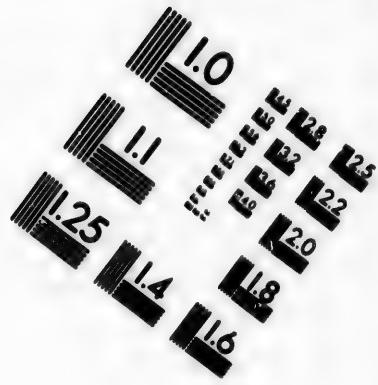
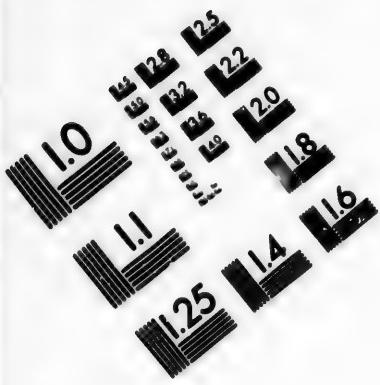
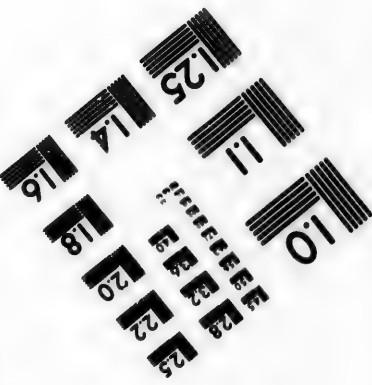
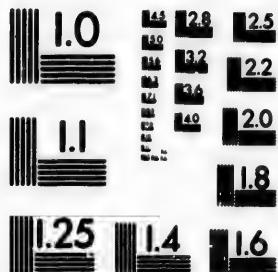


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CHAPTER XX.

DR. JOLLIFFE'S OPINION.

"LOR ! my lady !" cried old Jane Wood quite crossly, "don't go for to talk such rubbish. Day of your your death indeed, and when you are as well and as hearty as any mother could wish to be. You don't expect to feel as if you were nineteen, when you're hard on your forty-first birthday, do you ? Why you're *wonderful*, that's what you are, taking all things into consideration, and six months hence, I expect to see you trotting about all over the place, as you used to do when you first come to it, and I after you, with young master in my arms."

Lady Chichester smiled brightly at the picture the old nurse had conjured up, as she turned over a drawer full of little caps, all highly bedizened with Valenciennes lace and ribbons, and each bearing the cockade that betokens the wearer to be an embryo lord of the creation.

"We make quite certain it will be a boy," she said softly, "but, for my part, I don't care which it may be, so long as it is alive and well."

"Then I'm ashamed to hear you say so, my lady," resumed the servant, "and I shall be ashamed of you into the bargain if it *isn't* a boy. Lor ! what should you have but a boy, and the first time too ! It *must*

be a boy! Sir Alan and Miss Chichester, to say nothing of your own family, will be all terribly disappointed if it isn't. A *girl* wouldn't be of any manner of use at all to us. She could only take the money and leave the title to go to strangers just the same. You mustn't ever *think* of such rubbish, my lady. You can please yourself afterwards, but the first time it *must* be a boy."

Lady Chichester smiled again at the old woman's enthusiasm.

"But one mustn't make too sure, Jane," she said, "or the disappointment will be twice as hard to bear. Leave it to God's hands, my dear friend. He is sure to do everything right. Cora dear, if you are not too tired, I should like you to unpack the rest of the *layette*. How beautifully the little clothes are made. I love to look at them and handle them. They seem to thrill me through and through as if I already knew the dear little child who, please God, will wear them hereafter."

"Don't you think, dear Lady Chichester, that you had better lie down and rest now until Sir Alan comes to take you for your drive? I will unpack the other boxes during your absence, and have everything laid out ready for your inspection on your return."

"Yes, dear, that certainly will be best; but you always seem to know what *will* be best for me. If I get over my approaching trial, Cora, and live to see my child grow up to manhood or womanhood, I shall always think that I owe it chiefly to your care of me. Everybody is very kind and attentive, my

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darling Alan most of all, but you seem to anticipate my wants, and prevent ill consequences. You are my pilot engine, Cora, and your love goes before me to avoid danger. How can I ever repay you for all your goodness to me?"

Cora bent over the speaker and kissed her warmly, whilst Jane Wood turned away and muttered to herself in the distance. Miss Murray had gained so firm a footing in Glebe Royal, and was on such excellent terms with both the master and the mistress, that no one in the household presumed to question her orders, or pay inattention to her wishes. Even Miss Chichester, when she observed the very reticent demeanor which she had maintained ever since the day of the doctor's consultation, and the strict attention she had paid to her duties, began to doubt whether her eyes had deceived her on the morning in question, and whether the poor girl had after all been a willing recipient of her brother's impetuous embraces. Still, Miss Chichester could no more overcome her dislike to Cora Murray than Jane Wood could. Both these women bore a marked antagonism to Lady Chichester's companion, and were always on the alert to detect any shortcoming on her part, and it says a great deal for Miss Murray's acuteness that she managed to elude their vigilance as long as she did.

On the morning in question, Sir Alan came in, radiant with good humor, to take his wife down to her carriage. He was always good-humored now. He had obtained his heart's desire, and he was in charity with all mankind. He had become so care-

ful of Lady Chichester, that he would not permit anyone to drive her but himself, although the old coachman, who had been in their service for years, was a much better whip than his master. But the hunting season was over by this time. Spring was close upon them, and the baronet was free to spend his days as he chose, and he chose to employ them by waiting upon his wife. No one must walk with her, or drive with her, or carry her meals backwards and forwards but himself. To some women this devoted attention from a husband who had shown himself decidedly weary of their society for some years past would have proved rather *ennuyante*, but Alice took it all in good faith, and basked in it like a cat in sunshine. She did not see, happily for herself, that the unwonted devotion was laid, not at her feet so much as at those of the mother of his heir, and that all his new-born fears and anxieties were for the child that was coming to him, rather than for the woman who was destined to bear it. Cora Murray's thoughts ran much after this fashion, as she watched the big baronet clumsily folding the mantle round Lady Chichester's form, and supporting her downstairs to the carriage that was in waiting.

"Ah, poor dear," sighed Jane Wood as she looked after them, "pray the Lord everything may go right with her, but it's a terrible trial as lies before her, and though of course the master will have the best of advice and nursing, I shall never have a moment's peace till it's well over."

"You don't think her ladyship will pull through it," remarked Cora, carelessly.

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"God forbid, Miss. 'Twould be a dark day for Glebe Royal and poor Sir Alan if anything happened to my lady, as was his first love and will be his last. But there's no doubt she's weakly, and I am afraid this will leave her weaker than before. But there! She'll have the dear baby, and that will compensate her for anything."

"Yes, if it lives," said Cora Murray.

"O Miss, don't hint at the contrary," cried Jane, "for it would break all our hearts. What! to lose it after we've been waiting for it so many years! Sure, the Lord could never be so hard as that. O no, we shall have an heir to Glebe Royal right enough, and if her ladyship only gets back her strength and is able to enjoy her happiness, we shall have nothing left to wish for. You seem so fond of the mistress, Miss Murray, that you ought to rejoice over her prospects as much as anyone," she continued in a suspicious manner.

"And who says I do not, Mrs. Wood?" rejoined Cora. "Lady Chichester's treatment of me is sufficient to show in what estimation she holds my services, but I am not in the habit of showing my feelings perhaps as easily as other people. But I am going to take the opportunity of her ladyship's absence to have a walk, so leave the rest of the unpacking until I return. Lady Chichester has left the matter with me, and desired me to see that it is correct."

And with that she walked out of the room.

"Not in the habit of showing your feelings," soliloquized old Jane, as her back was turned. "No, I should think not, considering you've got none to

show. I don't believe in your wheedling ways and kisses, and I wish my poor dear didn't believe in them neither, but I daren't say a word to upset her at the present moment. But just wait till it's all right again, and then see if I don't let her know one or two things as has come to my ears lately."

Meantime Cora had assumed her walking attire and started for a ramble, not, however, without a hidden purpose. Her desire now was to inveigle Dr. Jolliffe into her confidence, and find out if his opinion of Lady Chichester's condition coincided with her own, and whether there was any chance of her own wishes being realized in the future. Dr. Jolliffe had always been very partial to Lady Chichester's companion. He considered her a great success, and a success we have helped to build ourselves always appears double to us. So when he met her that morning, quite accidentally, as it seemed, in the course of his daily rounds, he saluted her with a smiling face, as he asked after Lady Chichester's health.

"Off guard I see, Miss Murray," he said, "and so the question is almost unnecessary. Your attention to her ladyship is so proverbial that I am sure you would not have left her side unless she had been quite well."

"You are right, Doctor Jolliffe," she answered with a subdued smile. "I should certainly not be out walking if Lady Chichester required me. But she is driving with Sir Alan. His devotion puts mine to the blush. It seems as if he could not bear to lose sight of her since you brought the happy news.

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But I do hope she will not over-fatigue herself. She is very delicate, you know, and the least exertion does her harm, and I am almost afraid sometimes that she is taking too much exercise."

"Not a bit of it," cried the doctor cheerfully; "she can't take too much exercise as long as she enjoys it."

"Oh, but, doctor," cried Miss Murray, "you only see her at intervals, you know, and after she has had a good night's rest.. If you watched her all day, as I do, you would be alarmed at the weakness she sometimes exhibits. Yesterday she fainted at the dinner table without any reason whatever."

"That's nothing. Lady Chichester is a fainting subject. She has been used to fainting all her life, and in her condition it is the commonest thing possible. How does she sleep at night ?"

"Very well, I believe, but then you see her mind is at ease. She has no apprehension of the future. She is very ignorant on such matters, and fancies everything *must* go right with her, poor dear."

"And so it will, so it will," exclaimed the doctor ; "we shall have a bouncing boy or girl at Glebe Royal about the middle of March. Does she eat well ?"

"Yes, for her," replied the companion.

She was speaking the truth now because she wanted to extract the truth from her auditor. She had sought the interview with the sole view of ascertaining exactly what he thought regarding the chances of life or death for her employer.

"Well, what do you want more," asked Dr. Jolliffe. "She eats well, and sleeps well, and takes

exercise, and is in good spirits. I call that a clean bill of health. We shall see her riding to the meet next season with Sir Alan, and then your nose will be put out of joint, eh, Miss Murray?"

"O doctor, pray do not jest on such a subject. You make my blood curdle. You do not know perhaps how attached I am to her ladyship, nor how anxious I feel on this subject. I have a foreboding that all will not go well with her in March, and that Glebe Royal will be turned into a house of mourning. Pray, *pray* relieve my fears, if you have any reasonable ground for doing so."

The doctor looked grave, and a little puzzled.

"I don't know *why* you should be so anxious, Miss Murray. I see nothing in Lady Chichester's condition to make you so. Of course, we all know that life is uncertain, and that it is impossible to foretell the future, but as far as science can decide for her, she has every prospect of a successful issue to her trial."

"But, doctor, think of her age, and the many years of previous debility from which she has suffered. It is not as if she were a young and healthy woman. Even for such it is a great risk, but for her, I cannot think how she will ever go through with it."

"It's only your ignorance that makes you so nervous, Miss Murray," replied the doctor; "many of these cases for which the greatest fears are entertained turn out the easiest in the end. There's no occasion for your forebodings. They do honor to your feelings for your employer, but I must beg you will dismiss them from your mind or they may infect

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her. For to suspect that those around her have any fears of her safety would have the worst possible effect upon Lady Chichester. I want her to be perfectly at ease and tranquil regarding herself, and there is no reason whatever why she should be otherwise."

"Then you really and truly believe that I am frightening myself for nothing," said Cora Murray, with an inquiring look at her companion.

"I believe that your warm heart, in this instance, has run away with your cool head, my dear young lady," replied Dr. Jolliffe, "and I am as anxious to allay your fears for your own sake as for that of her ladyship. I fear nothing for her, *nothing* whatever, and believe she will run no greater risk than any other woman. She is delicate, but she is perfectly healthy, and has, I believe, a long life before her. I'd lay any odds that she outlives the baronet, robust as he appears to be. And with the care and affection which all her friends, yourself included, will lavish on her at this juncture, why, nothing *can* go wrong, and that's my candid opinion."

"Thank you, Dr. Jolliffe. It is such a relief to my mind to hear you say so. I have been worrying myself about her more than you would believe, of late, but I shall follow your example now, and look forward to nothing but happiness."

"That's right," said the doctor, "you're a good girl, Miss Murray, and a sensible girl, and my sister-in-law couldn't have chosen a better companion for my old friend. Well, good-bye, and let me hear you laugh and sing for the future."

"Yes, on the wrong side of my mouth," thought Cora Murray, as she shook hands with him and left him.

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CHAPTER XXI.

AN HEIR TO GLEBE ROYAL.

AFTER this, the days succeeded each other very quickly at Glebe Royal, and were chiefly employed in making preparations for the important event that was expected to take place in the middle of March. Sir Alan's devotion to his wife continued unabated, and his manner towards Miss Murray was so easy and indifferent, that a sharer of his secrets might have well doubted if the baronet remembered that any passages of a tender nature had ever taken place between them. But Cora was too much a woman of the world not to know better. She was perfectly aware that whatever a married man may swear or do when he believes himself safe from detection, he is very seldom prepared to stick to his word when there is a chance of being found out. Men, as a rule, are too intensely selfish to risk anything. It is the women only who are such fools as to throw away their reputations and their happiness for the sake of a loving word or a warm embrace. Cora Murray knew that when the question of wife and home and friends came to the front, such as she might go to the wall. She had never worked for more than to catch the fickle heart of the baronet in the rebound, and that she still hoped to do, and, given the opportunity, was firmly convinced that she should do. For

if she sometimes almost believed that Sir Alan's pricking conscience had rendered her presence distasteful to him, a chance look, or touch (to say nothing of the anxiety he exhibited not to be left alone with her), betrayed that the feelings to which he had confessed were kept in abeyance from a sense of honor, and that it only needed a breath on the smouldering fire to make it burst out into a flame again.

Had it not been so, she would have felt that she was wasting her time by remaining at Glebe Royal. As it was, she decided that it might be worth while to stop and watch the course of events.

"Should anything go wrong with Lady Chichester, and there is always the chance of it," she argued, "the baronet will be ready to run to anyone for comfort, and I don't think he will waver long between his sister and myself. Were my heart at all concerned in the matter, this state of things would be altogether intolerable to me, but as it is, I really don't much care which way it turns out."

But no one who had seen her patiently trimming little cambric shirts with lace, or knitting baby shoes, could have suspected her of harboring such treacherous thoughts against the peace of Glebe Royal. Even the blundering baronet was deceived by her modest demeanor, and flattered himself that she felt as sorry as he did for having been betrayed into such disloyalty to Lady Chichester, and was as anxious to make up for it by an extra amount of attention and care.

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Of course, everything that was done to welcome the expected heir to Glebe Royal was on the most extravagant and costly scale. Sir Alan could not think of sparing money on such an occasion, and his anxiety concerning his wife made him engage the highest authorities possible to look after her welfare. Dr. Norman was to be telegraphed for, directly there was the least sign of his services being required, and to remain at Glebe Royal in conjunction with Dr. Jolliffe until her ladyship's safety was assured, and a nurse (who had never attended anyone lower than a countess before) was settled there for at least a week beforehand. This person, Mrs. Markham by name (who was a very fine person indeed), came rustling down in her silks and her satins, and gave a great deal more trouble than the mistress of the house. Of course, everything that had been prepared before her arrival was entirely wrong, and had to be altered immediately, and if the baronet or Miss Chichester ventured to make a suggestion, or argue a point, they were immediately treated to such a dose of Lady Caroline This, or the Duchess of That, as effectually closed the discussion. As for poor Lady Chichester, she hardly dared say her soul was her own during that terrible week of waiting. Mrs. Markham sat upon her as effectually, both figuratively and literally (as she seemed to consider it her duty not to leave her alone for five minutes together), that the poor little lady almost felt at last that she had been very presumptuous in having a baby at all without first asking Mrs. Markham's permission. The person in Glebe Royal that this authority

seemed to like best, and associate with most, was Miss Murray—partly, perhaps, because she fancied that she was more on a par with herself than the members of the family, and partly, she could say before her what she would not have dared to say to them. For if a monthly nurse can't *talk*, she is nowhere. One might as well deprive her of her meat and drink at once.

"Ah," Mrs. Markham would observe, with a solemn shake of the head, as she and Cora descended the staircase together after having attended Lady Chichester to bed. "Ah, it'll be a trying case this—mark my words. Her ladyship is terribly delicate. She reminds me so much of the Duchess of Thistledown. I'm sure I can't think how she'll ever pull through it."

"Do you think there is *danger*?" whispered Cora back in return.

"We must hope not, my dear. Dr. Norman is very clever. I've seen him do miracles. I'm sure when Lady Languish lay about dying, with her breath like a cold vapor on one's face, he brought her back, as it were, from the grave. He'll do his best for her ladyship, you may depend upon that. But I shall have a fine time of it, I expect, nursing her. I only hope we may have a healthy baby, or my hands will be full."

"I suppose Mrs. Wood will take the baby for you, won't she?" asked Cora.

Mrs. Markham rustled her portly figure round to express her astonishment.

"What! trust *the heir* to that old griffin to look after? No, my dear, I know my duty better. Boy or girl, it don't leave my hands under the fortnight, and then it must be to someone more scientific than that old woman. Why, she wouldn't know how to handle it. It requires a lot of practice to wash and dress these tender creatures, and I wouldn't answer for its life—no, nor her ladyship's either—if I'm not there to look after them both."

But however well-intentioned Mrs. Markham might be, she was not powerful enough, it seemed, to foretell the decrees of Fate, for, a few days after she had entered upon her duties, she was going upstairs after a plentiful supper, and a little of 'something hot,' and turning round suddenly to address Miss Murray, she missed her footing, and rolled right down into the hall again. Cora flew after her in a moment, and Sir Alan and Miss Chichester came out of the library at the same time, but they were too late to prevent an accident. She was a tall and portly woman, and she had fallen with her legs under her. The consequence of which was, that when, in answer to an urgent summons, Dr. Jolliffe appeared upon the scene of action, he found that the limb was broken, and that the nurse must at once be put to bed, and abandon all idea of pursuing her professional duties.

"But what shall we do for a substitute?" exclaimed Sir Alan, with a long face blanched with apprehension; "my wife may require her services at any moment, and there is not a woman in the village whom I would allow to enter her chamber."

"Dear me, dear me, that's easily settled," replied the doctor. "Haven't we got women and to spare in the house, who will look after her ladyship till we can send for another nurse from London? But our first object must be to get this poor creature's leg set. She's an inflammatory subject, and the sooner it's done the better. Have you a bedroom on the ground floor, that we may avoid carrying her upstairs? I don't want Lady Chichester to get wind of this accident, or it may give her a bad night."

"But Jane Wood has already told her, Dr. Jolliffe," interposed Cora Murray, "and her ladyship wants to see you as soon as ever you are at leisure."

"Confound that old woman's meddling!" exclaimed the doctor; "all the mischief in the world is done by these chattering tongues. All right, Miss Murray. Run back and tell her ladyship that I'll be with her directly, but this is quite an ordinary accident, and nothing whatever to be alarmed at."

But when the poor moaning and groaning Mrs. Markham had been carried to bed and undressed, it was found that she had sustained a compound fracture, and had nothing to do but to lie there until she was well again.

"The most unfortunate thing that could have happened!" exclaimed the doctor, in a tone of annoyance, as he pulled on his coat after setting the fractured limb, "and here's the twelfth of the month, and we can't telegraph to London till to-morrow morning. Well, well, it can't be helped now, and it's no use crying over spilt milk."

"Doctor," said Cora Murray, as soon as he had left the room, "will you come up and see Lady Chi-

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The doctor went upstairs, grumbling all the way at the carelessness which had occasioned the trouble, and walked leisurely into Lady Chichester's room. But after a few minutes there he came out again, and called for Cora Murray from the head of the stairs.

"Come in here, I want to speak to you," he said, turning into her own sitting-room as she joined him. And then, when the door had closed behind them, he continued: "What were you about to do? Go to bed?"

"Certainly, if there is no occasion to sit up, Dr. Jolliffe. It is past one o'clock."

"But there *is* occasion. I am not going home to-night, and her ladyship may require you."

"Do you mean to say——?"

"Yes! I *do* mean to say, but I only say it to you. I don't want the whole house to hear the news, especially that old fool, Jane Wood. Neither do I wish to alarm Sir Alan and Miss Chichester. The less people her ladyship has about her the better. Can't you manage to make them all go to bed?"

"They are going now, Dr. Jolliffe. They have made all arrangements for Mrs. Markham's comfort—Annie, the housemaid, is to sit up with her to-night—and are lighting their candlesticks in the hall."

"Very good. I will go and tell them that I will lie down on the sofa for a few hours in case Mrs. Markham should require me, and you must go into Lady Chichester's room and dismiss Jane Wood for

the night. If anything should happen—as I can't have Dr. Norman or Mrs. Markham—I would rather be alone with your cool head and ready hands to help me."

"It will be easy to get rid of old Jane, because she always goes to bed first and leaves me to read her ladyship to sleep."

"Very well. Make haste about it, for I want that prying old fool out of the way."

Miss Murray did at once as she was bid. She found Lady Chichester in a terrible state of excitement at the idea of nurse's accident, and what would become of her and her baby if the great authority was absent after all. Cora sent Jane Wood away, and tried her best to soothe her ladyship's fears, but they were not easily allayed. Alice's cheeks were feverishly bright, and her tongue ran incessantly, until physical uneasiness began to turn her thoughts in another direction. Dr. Jolliffe only waited to be sure that the baronet and his sister had retired to their own apartments, when he threw off the plaids and rugs, with which they had insisted upon covering him, and crept upstairs to Lady Chichester's room, where he found his patient quietly moaning, and Miss Murray setting all things in readiness for the event as deftly as if she had been Mrs. Markham herself.

"You're a clever girl, my dear," he said, admiringly, as he watched her. "I should like to have you for my assistant. If I had known you were half as intelligent, I should never have sent for Mrs. Markham at all. A sharp friend is worth twenty professional nurses in a case like this."

"You mustn't praise me so much, or I shall grow conceited," said Cora. "You forget that Mrs. Markham has been here nearly a week, and arranged everything in readiness for herself. I am only imitating what I saw her do."

"Well, you do it so nicely that I am almost pleased to think the old woman is safe downstairs. This is going to be a much shorter business than I anticipated, Miss Murray. Her ladyship is going on wonderfully well—couldn't be better—and we shall have that young gentleman here before morning."

And in effect, after a vigil of some four or five hours, whilst the household were still wrapped in slumber, a loud squall was heard in Lady Chichester's room, and the heir to Glebe Royal was ushered into the world with the dawn.

"All over, my lady!" exclaimed the doctor, heartily, "and here we have the *boy* at last. And a good thumping big boy too. Mercy on us, sir! you needn't squall so loud, though you *are* the heir to Glebe Royal. Do you want to wake the whole house to do you honor? Well, I hope your ladyship is satisfied at last."

"Cora," said Lady Chichester, faintly, "call my Alan to me."

"Yes, yes," acquiesced the doctor, "you can go and tell Sir Alan the happy news, Miss Murray, but say he must be as quiet as a mouse if he comes in here. And call up old Jane at the same time. Now that everything's happily over the old witch may make herself useful."

CHAPTER XXII.

SOLEMN CHARGE.

CORA MURRAY heard the words plainly enough, but for a moment she stood motionless, transfixed by the thoughts that overwhelmed her. It was decided then, and the Fates were against her. Dr. Jolliffe had been right, and all the rest wrong. The promised heir had arrived, strong and lusty—Lady Chichester was a happy mother—and she would be nothing whatever in future to any of them. And *this* was the message they entrusted her to carry to Sir Alan—the death-knell of her own hopes and schemes. Her teeth clenched and her black brows lowered. All the inherent malice and revenge in her nature was to the uppermost, and she felt that she could have killed Alice Chichester where she lay, exhausted but smiling, with her infant in her arms.

"Make haste, Miss Murray, please," urged the doctor, "we have no time for dawdling. Send Mrs. Wood down here first to attend to this young gentleman, and then you can rouse the baronet. I suppose he would never forgive us if we neglected to give him the earliest intelligence of his son's arrival?"

"I will go at once," replied Cora Murray, as she left the room, still walking in a dream.

The commotion that followed the announcement of her news may be easily imagined. It was like

the sound that we are promised at the Last Day—the trump that wakes the dead, and converted the unconscious household of Glebe Royal into the semblance of a disturbed ant-hill. Old Jane Wood fell on her knees as soon as she comprehended what had taken place, and began offering up hallelujas instead of putting on her clothes, until Miss Murray's orders and female curiosity combined made her hurry down to welcome the new arrival. Miss Chichester (who, like many other elderly and ill-favored women, did not consider she was safe unless her bed-chamber door were barred and bolted for the night) took a good deal of waking, and, when fully aroused, had to appear before Cora's astonished eyes in a marvelous garment of flannel before she could distinctly hear the reason for which she was disturbed. But when she *did* hear it, the hard face quivered with emotion, and the bony hands trembled so violently that she had the greatest difficulty in fastening her dress.

"Perhaps you will kindly inform Sir Alan of what has taken place," said Cora Murray. "Dr. Jolliffe commissioned me to tell him, but I think you are the proper person to do so."

"O certainly, Miss Murray. You are quite right. It would hardly be the correct thing for a young woman to inform a gentleman of such an event. And at his bedroom door too. O dear no! You had better return to Lady Chichester, and I will tell my brother the good news myself."

The consequence of which was that, half an hour later, Sir Alan, pale with excitement, came creeping into his wife's room, and, going up to the bedside,

knelt down there as if in prayer. Dr. Jolliffe turned his head aside at once, and walked into the adjoining room to give Jane Wood some directions regarding the infant. His sensibility made him recoil from being witness to such a scene : it was sacred to the newly-made father and mother. But Cora Murray had no such delicate scruples. In *her* eyes there was something distinctly ludicrous in seeing a big, burly man like the baronet sprawling on his knees, like a boy of twenty, and in hearing the words of love and gratitude that came bubbling from his lips. Her mouth had an ugly sneer upon it, and she felt that she hated them both, as she stood by and watched them folded in each other's arms.

" My Alice ! " the baronet exclaimed, in a voice full of emotion. " Thank God that you are safe. This is the very happiest day of all my life."

" O Alan, I am so thankful, I don't know what to say. Look at the little darling. Isn't he sweet? His eyes are quite brown, like yours, dear, and his little head is all over curls. I never thought we should have such a blessing as this to call our own. And a boy too! It seems too much—as if God were resolved to leave us nothing to desire."

" Nothing could be too much or too good for you, my own sweet wife. This dear little fellow has come as a reward for all your long-suffering and patience. It is *I* who do not deserve him. And yet he is mine—ours—all our own. We shall live our future lives in him."

But at this juncture Miss Chichester stalked into the room, looking unnaturally tall in her *deshabille*, like a grenadier in a dressing-gown.

"And so Geoffry has arrived," she began, in her stentorian voice. "Alice, my dear, I congratulate you. You've done the right thing at last. And is this the heir? Dear me. He looks rather small and red to own the whole of Glebe Royal, but I suppose he'll grow before that time comes. I can remember the day *you* were born, Alan, and you were very much like this. Well! well! Time works wonders, and it's a fault on the right side to be too young. It's lucky for you that you're a boy, young sir, for I should never have forgiven you if you had been a girl."

"Miss Chichester," said the doctor, coming forward, "I'm sorry to cut short your congratulations, but I can't have so much talking nor so many people in the sick room."

"Well, there are others you can send away," retorted Miss Chichester, with a glance at the companion.

"You mean Miss Murray? No, I can't spare *her*. She has been of incalculable assistance to me during Lady Chichester's illness, and I intend to appoint her chief nurse until Mrs. Markham's substitute arrives. But I must ask you and Sir Alan to leave the room again now. Lady Chichester is very weak, and requires the most perfect repose. If she is at all excited she will suffer from it afterwards."

The baronet rose at once, and kissed his wife and child.

"Good-bye, my darlings, for the present," he said "we are all under the doctor's orders. Come, Anna."

"I call this an insult," exclaimed Miss Chichester, as her brother drew her away, "and that fool Jolliffe,

shall answer to me for it by and by. To turn *us* out of Alice's room while that minx, Cora Murray, remains in it! I never heard of such a thing! I suppose she's been philandering with him now, and trying to twist him round her little finger. A pretty state of affairs indeed, when Geoffry's father and aunt are not allowed to see him, whilst Miss Murray is to be installed as chief nurse. It's not been done by fair means, I'll take my oath of *that*."

And so, fuming and fussing, Miss Chichester retreated to her own apartments again, whilst Sir Alan sought the open air to try and walk off the excitement that threatened to stifle him. Meanwhile Dr. Jolliffe having administered some soothing mixture to Lady Chichester, watched her drop off into a tranquil sleep, and then called Miss Murray into the adjoining room.

"I am going home now, for a few hours," he said, "and if you want me you'll know where to find me. But I don't apprehend any necessity for your doing so. Her ladyship is going on very well, and by this evening we'll have a nurse to take the charge of her off your hands. But I must have her kept quiet, Miss Murray—absolutely and entirely quiet. I have told Jane Wood to keep the infant in this room, and I want only *you* to remain in that one. Now, do you understand me? Please to lock the door against all intruders until I return. I shall not be longer than I can possibly help."

"I will obey your orders, Dr. Jolliffe, but you had better explain them to Miss Chichester and Sir Alan also. I cannot help myself if they come hammering at the door for admittance."

"They must not attempt to enter. I will make that clearly understood. Lady Chichester's welfare depends on it. And now, Miss Murray, I am about to give you a serious charge. There is only *one* thing I fear, and that is, the state of her ladyship's heart. It is very weak, and any attack of faintness must be carefully warded off. That is why I have chosen to leave her in your care. You are intelligent, and you are attached to her. Don't take your eyes off her face. Sit down here," continued Dr. Jolliffe, placing a chair by the bedside, "and don't leave her for a minute. If she sleeps on, well and good, but if she wakes and appears at all agitated, give her a dose of this without the slightest delay."

"And how much does a dose consist of?" inquired Cora, as she took a small vial from the doctor's hand.

"A teaspoonful in a wine glass of water. Have everything ready beside you, so that there may be no hesitation in administering it. You don't know how much may depend on your promptitude. I had prepared Mrs. Markham for this, but her accident has of course rendered my directions useless."

"I conclude this mixture is to revive the action of the heart in case of failure," remarked Cora, still examining the bottle of medicine.

"It is—but there is no need for you to know *too* much, Miss Murray," replied the doctor, smiling. "Give it if necessary, thought I trust it may not be. These nervous shocks are sometimes followed by very grave consequences to a constitution like Lady Chichester's."

He went up to the bedside and felt the sleeping woman's pulse as he spoke. "Very quiet and regular," he said, "everything going on as well as possible. I leave her in your care then, Miss Murray, and after I have had a look at the broken leg down-stairs, I'll go home and relieve Mrs. Jolliffe's mind of the cause of my staying out all-night."

He walked cautiously from the room as he spoke, and left Cora at the bedside with the vial in her hands.

"*Everything going on well,*" she thought to herself, "of course every thing is going on well, and will continue to do so, and I shall have to look out for a berth elsewhere. It's just like my luck. When I was getting on so capitally with the baronet, and had the ball, as it were, at my feet, the whole scene changes as if by magic, and instead of a coffin, we have a cradle and general rejoicings all round. Bah! it makes me sick to see them spooning over each other, and to remember what might have happened if my lucky star had only been in the ascendant. But I shall never get him back again whilst she lives. I can see that plainly enough. She has assumed a new importance in his eyes as the mother of his heir, and he will never be able to separate the two again. He will worship his gratified vanity in her, and imagine it is love for the woman he was ready to betray. What self-deceiving fools men are, and how quick to believe what they wish to be true."

She poured a teaspoonful of the medicine into a wineglass of water, and set it on a little table by her side.

"It will be best to have everything ready in case of need," she thought, "and then there will be no delay. But, supposing she wakes as the doctor described, and I did *not* give her the mixture. What would happen then, I wonder—I wonder——"

She sat down in the chair by the bedside and folded her hands in her lap, and gave herself up to unholy thoughts. Do the spirits of evil really come at such moments, and whisper in men's ears the deeds they wish them to commit? Are they enabled to make some peculiar temperaments imbibe their doctrines, without knowing why they should do so, or what unseen power urges them to commit crimes against their will? As Cora Murray watched by Lady Chichester's side, her handsome features dark and lowered, the enemy of mankind himself might have been hiding behind those frowning brows and angry, envious eyes. To most women, the fair, pale prettiness of the newly-made mother would have appealed for sympathy—her trembling, long-expected happiness would have secured their gratulation. But not so with Cora Murray. She had never even liked Lady Chichester. Her pretended affection and interest had been assumed for her own purposes, and now regarded her simply as the obstacle to her gaining the prize she had made so sure of. And as she sat there, silent and solitary, watching the exhausted sleeper, the daylight seemed to fade away, and the room filled with ghostly faces and spectral fingers, all urging her on to remove the stumbling-book that stood in her path, and clear the way for her own advancement. As she was listening with bated

breathing and horror-stricken eyes to the devilish voices within her, there was a start, and a stifled cry, and Lady Chichester awoke, flushed and panting, and sprang upright in bed, struggling for breath.

Cora intuitively seized the glass of medicine which was to relieve her, but paused a moment, and in that moment of hesitation some fiend seemed to hold it to her own lips, and force her to drink the draught down to the very dregs.

"Lie down," she whispered hoarsely to the patient, "you mustn't rise. Lie down."

"Air—air," panted Lady Chichester, as she feebly struggled with her encircling arms. "Cora, air."

"Be quiet, Lady Chichester. Lie back on your pillows. This is nothing. It will be soon over."

Alice lay back as she was desired. Her heart was failing fast, and she had no power of resistance. Her flushed face faded to ashen grey—her parted lips became livid—her dilated eyes glazed over with the film of death.

"Alan!—my child!" she murmured, faintly—and closed her patient eyes in the eternal sleep.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BEAUTIFUL ANGEL.

AT first, Cora Murray could not believe that it was over, really over, and that Lady Chichester would speak to her no more. She stood at the bedside for some minutes waiting for her to revive, but when she saw the blue eyes wide open, but without sense or light in them, a sudden horror seized her that her wishes should have been fulfilled so soon, and she caught the dead woman in her arms and shook her violently.

"Wake up! wake up!" she cried; "try and shake off this drowsiness. See! I have some medicine for you, Lady Chichester. Open your mouth, and I will give it you."

She tried with trembling hands to pour out a second dose of the mixture, but spilt it over the table instead, and another glance at the silent figure on the bed made the bottle fall from her hands with a crash upon the floor.

"It is useless," she exclaimed in a frightened whisper, "she is really gone, and *I*—O God! what am *I*? Alice! Alice!" she continued vehemently, "it was a mistake. I didn't know what I was doing. As Heaven is my witness, I never meant to go as far as this."

But it was too late for Lady Chichester to extend either mercy or forgiveness to her unhappy companion, and, with a shriek of genuine horror and dismay, Miss Murray rushed to the next room, and roused old Jane Wood, who sat, with the heir on her lap, nodding over the fire.

"Mrs. Wood, wake up for Heaven's sake and come to Lady Chichester! Something dreadful has happened to her. She will neither speak nor look at me. My God! what can it be?" She was shaking all over, and her teeth chattered so violently, as she stared with her large, dark eyes into Jane Wood's face, that the old servant guessed the calamity that had fallen on the house at once. Her consternation took the form of anger.

"Why, what *should* have happened to her ladyship, unless it's one of them nasty faints, and if you'd been doing your duty by her, Miss Murray, you'd have prevented it's coming on," she exclaimed, as she laid the infant hastily in his *bassinette* and ran to the assistance of her mistress. But the first glance told her the truth. Lady Chichester, already looking twenty years younger under the influence of the beautiful angel, was laid back on her pillows unmistakeably, irrecoverably *dead*. The old nurse gazed at her for a few moments in speechless dismay, and then fell to sobbing as if her heart would break.

"O, Miss Alice, my darling child, my nursling, come back to us! O, why have you gone just now! Now, when everything has come to you that you have been waiting for so long! O my lady, my lady! We shall never, *never* see your like again."

She wept for some minutes in uncontrollable anguish before she remembered what was due to the rest of the family.

"I must go and break this terrible news to Miss Chichester and the baronet at once," she said. "O poor Sir Alan! It will just spoil the rest of his life for him, and I doubt if he'll ever bear to look at the child now that's taken her from us. Miss Murray, stay here whilst I go and call him. It's our first duty to tell the poor gentleman what has happened."

"No, no, don't leave me here," cried Cora, with a look of horror on her scared face. "I am not well, Mrs. Wood. I cannot stay. I will go and send Miss Chichester to you. I will say that her ladyship is ill. We must not break it to them all at once. The shock will be too great. But are you quite, *quite* sure that she is gone?"

"Have you ever looked on death before, Miss, and can you ask me that question? *Gone!* Yes, indeed, she is gone, God help us! She's one of His angels now, if ever a woman was. But if the sight of her blessed face scares you, why run and call Miss Chichester, as you say, and send for the doctor. He can't do no good, but it's right he should be here. O, my dear, *dear* lady, that he should come back on such a pitiful errand as this!"

Cora Murray left the old servant kissing the hand of her dead mistress and crying over it, whilst she flew, still with that blanched and horror-stricken face, to Miss Chichester's room.

"Come downstairs at once," she exclaimed breathlessly. "Mrs. Wood wants you. Lady Chichester is

not so well. I am just going to send for the doctor."

"Step in a minute, if you please, Miss Murray, and let me understand my sister-in-law's symptoms. It is of no use hurrying in this way. I thought Dr. Jolliffe was very foolish to trust her to the care of a person so inexperienced as yourself, but these doctors are all fools. Is she feverish, or faint, or what? Was no medicine left for her to take in case of an emergency?"

"I cannot wait, Miss Chichester. I must send James at once for the doctor. Go down to Mrs. Wood and find out for yourself, but *pray go*."

The urgency of the appeal, as well as the expression on Miss Murray's face, sent Miss Chichester downstairs in double-quick time to hear of the calamity that had befallen them, whilst Cora, having dispatched the servant to summons the doctor, went up trembling with fear and remorse to her own room, and locked herself in.

What *had* she done? What had she *done*?

She sat down at the table and leant her elbows upon it to support her head, which seemed as though it were about to burst with the whirring and the buzzing of a thousand wheels within her brain, but they shook so that they only made her worse. And so she lay back in the chair instead, and fixed her eyes upon the grey March sky, and tried to persuade her conscience that it had all been an unfortunate mistake, and no real blame could lie at her door for Lady Chichester's death. She had intended to give her the reviving mixture—why should she have placed it in readiness else?—but in her flurry and, confusion she had swallowed it herself, and, before she had

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time to prepare another dose, the poor creature had gone. It was a terrible thing to have been mixed up in, but there was no doubt that Lady Chichester would have died under any circumstances, and the medicine could have had no power to save her. And if Dr. Jolliffe knew the risk she ran, he ought to have remained by her bedside himself. Cora wished, as she pressed both her hands against her burning head, that he *had* remained, and prevented such horrible ideas from keeping possession of her for the rest of her lifetime. She heard a great deal of hurrying about and confusion in the house from her place of concealment, and the sounds of weeping from the passages and stairs showed that the news had spread amongst the servants, but no one inquired for her, or attempted to invade her privacy, and so she remained silent, tearless, and alone for several hours. At the end of that time a knock sounded on her door, sounded several times, indeed, before it attracted her attention, and when she dragged herself up wearily to answer it, she found Dr. Jolliffe standing on the threshold. He did not ask permission to enter her room. He walked straight in, and closed the door behind him.

"This is a very sad business, Miss Murray," he commenced with portentous solemnity, "and I must put a few questions to you on the subject. I was surprised that you did not meet me downstairs, or indeed that you had left the bedside of your patient."

"Were you?" she replied in a husky voice; "if you understood what I felt, you would know why it was impossible for me to remain there."

"Doubtless you must feel it acutely, and especially as you were left in charge. At what time did it occur?"

"I cannot tell you. I can tell you nothing. I sat there watching, as you desired me, and all of a sudden she sprang up in the bed and fell back dead. The shock has nearly killed me."

"Did you administer the medicine as I told you?"

"There was no time. She could not swallow. She spilt it all."

"There was none spilt on the bed."

"No, on the floor. The bottle fell down. She was gasping for air. I was obliged to support her."

"Did she speak at all?"

"She called Sir Alan just before she died. They were the only words she said, except to ask for air. It was all over in a few minutes."

"I cannot understand your not having sufficient time to give her the medicine. If she had only swallowed a few drops, they would have restored the action of the heart. Of course we cannot always foresee these things, but I wish you could have got the medicine down a little quicker. Not that I mean to intimate that it was any fault of yours, my dear, only it is an irreparable misfortune. Poor Sir Alan is nearly out of his mind."

"I *hope*," ejaculated Cora, with dry lips, "I hope he does not consider me guilty of carelessness in the matter?"

"No, no, certainly not. Everyone knows how devoted you were to the poor lady. There will be an inquest of course, and your testimony will be re-

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quired. I wish we could prevent it, for the sake of
the family, but it is not to be avoided."

"I can say nothing more than I have said to you,"
replied Cora; "her death was terribly sudden."

The doctor rose to leave the room.

"I think you had better come downstairs now," he
said; "the house is naturally in great confusion, and
your absence is noticeable. When there is so much
to be done, one can hardly afford to indulge one's
fancy for solitude. Beside, you would wish surely to
take your turn at watching the dead."

Cora shrank from the suggestion, but concluded it
would be wiser to agree to it, and so, with solemn
step and heavy eyes, she followed the doctor down-
stairs.

The chamber, which in so short a space of time
had been the scene of so much mingled joy and
grief, was already strangely altered. Every article
of daily use had been carefully hidden away, and the
furniture covered with white cloths. On the bed,
reclining on a snowy sheet, and surrounded by hot-
house flowers, lay the body of Alice Chichester, and
a smile upon her gentle lips, as if she were already
listening, with the proud contempt of spirits risen, to
the sounds of weeping that reached her from below.

What a grand, majestic and beautiful thing is
Death! Who, looking on the calm, impenetrable
features, and the sealed lips, and the folded hands of
the dead, whose work is done, but must feel their
infinite superiority to the grimacing, chattering, rest-
less crowd of living. What peace! What sublime
indifference to all the ills of mortality are there!

Who can see them thus, and not long to follow them, aye by a thousand deaths, sooner than remain in this heartless, ephemeral life alone. Death has no terrors except for the survivors, who cannot rend their bonds at will and also be at rest.

But as Cora Murray approached the form of Alice Chichester, she shuddered convulsively. Would the pale corpse rise up to denounce her? No, it lay there still and smiling, as though both blessing and forgiveness breathed from its marble lips.

The companion glanced at it hurriedly, and passed through to the next room, where Miss Chichester and Jane Wood were holding watch and ward over the infant heir. The baronet's sister looked up with hollow eyes, as Miss Murray appeared, but she was too much broken down to find any fault.

"Since you are come," she said, in a low voice which was strangely unlike her own, "you had better remain here whilst Mrs. Wood has a few minutes to herself, for my brother sorely needs the comfort of my presence. Dr. Jolliffe assures me we shall have a proper nurse and a foster mother for this poor little orphan this evening, but, until they arrive, we must all take our share in watching the only treasure left to us."

Jane Wood quitted the room as soon as Miss Chichester gave her leave, and Miss Murray having taken her seat by the cradle in silence, the baronet's sister passed into the death chamber. But what was Cora's astonishment to hear the hard, stern, and apparently unemotional woman abandon herself,

when there, to a grief which she had not believed her capable of feeling.

"Alice, Alice," she sobbed, as she fell on her knees by the bedside, "why have you left us? You were all that made life bearable to me. I know that I was undemonstrative to you, my darling—it is my nature to be so more than my fault, and I fancied your soft, sweet disposition wanted bracing—but I loved you, *I loved you*, Alice, and I pray God you may know it now. Oh, why didn't He take me instead of you? My life is so unsociable, it would have been missed by no one; but you, my dear, gentle sister, who have borne with all my tempers for so many years, oh, it is too cruel. It will break my heart."

Then a deeper voice, though so full of pain as to be almost unrecognizable, mingled with Miss Chichester's, and Cora knew that Sir Alan had entered the room.

"Anna," he said hoarsely, "don't give way here. It seems almost sacrilegious. You might disturb her rest. Come with me, my dear sister. I want all your strength to keep me from breaking down."

"O Alan, I cannot help it. You do not understand my feelings. I have loved her, Heaven knows, but I have never shewn it, and perhaps she did not believe that it existed. But you, you were her idol. She never had any doubt of you."

"I know it, I know it," he answered hurriedly; "but, Anna, do you believe that she knows *everything* now?"

"Of course she does! How can you doubt it? Dear angel!" replied Miss Chichester.

"Then forgive me, Alice, forgive me," he cried, "if I have ever done or said anything to hurt your tender soul! I have been mad at times, my darling, but I have loved *you only*, through it all. O! my wife in heaven! I will live the rest of my life for you, as I would have done had you remained with me on earth, and when we meet again you shall tell me with your own dear lips that I have been faithful."

He fell on his knees beside his sister, and, regardless of all but themselves, they mingled their tears and prayers together.

And Cora Murray sat in the next room with the door ajar, and listened to it all.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

FOILED WITH HER OWN WEAPONS.

WHEN the nervous shock engendered by the first knowledge of her crime had somewhat abated, and she had argued herself into the belief that it was unintentional, and she had been simply the instrument used by Fate for the accomplishment of her designs, Cora Murray began to consider her best line of action for the future. She saw scarcely anything of the baronet during the sad times that followed his wife's death, for he shut himself up all day in his study, and refused admittance even to his sister. That was only natural. It was more than natural, it was decorous and right. Glebe Royal was truly turned into a house of mourning, and each day seemed to bring a sadder experience than the last to increase the general gloom. First, there was a visit from Dr. Norman, who brought the foster-mother for Sir Alan's heir in his train, and held a consultation with Dr. Jolliffe as to the cause of the unexpected demise of Lady Chichester, of which the verdict was syncope from failure of the action of the heart. This, however, was not sufficient to prevent the horrors of an inquest, always a difficult thing to avoid in the country, where the officials of the law have less work and more time than in London, and are generally pig-headed enough to thrust their noses

wherever they are least required. And then came the undertakers with their solemn, soul-sickening burdens, and the ceremony, which, perhaps, gives the greatest pain of all to the survivors, was gone through, and the scent of the new pine and the varnished oak permeated the passages and corridors of Glebe Royal, and made the passers-by shudder as they inhaled them. But still Alice Chichester, though more sunken and drawn each day, lay smiling in her coffin, while her sturdy little son sucked and squalled and grew lusty under the care of his foster-mother. And Cora Murray with nothing to do, and no one to associate with, sat in her room and wondered what would become of her. She concluded that, under any circumstances, she would have to leave Glebe Royal, at all events for a while. The question was, how to leave such an impression behind her as would ensure her being in due time sought out again, and reinstated on her throne of light. Sir Alan's grief would not last long. The more violent it was at first, the more chance there was of his speedy recovery, and with recovery would come the need of comfort, and the need of comfort would turn his thoughts to her. She recalled over and over again all that had occurred between them, and every word that they exchanged during that morning ride which immediately preceded the doctor's decision regarding Lady Chichester. The poor man had not had a chance since. His mind had been so preoccupied at first by the idea of the coming heir, and latterly by the death of his wife, that no one, in reason, could

have expected him to give a thought in any other direction. Miss Murray knew what men are, no one in the world better, and her knowledge included the truth, that when a man has lost what he most prized—either by death, or deceit, or dishonor—*then is the moment for the woman whom he esteems or admires to go in and win.* No heart, as a rule, so easily caught as that in the rebound. And had not Sir Alan confessed to her, even since that time, that he had really meant what he said, and that his consideration for his wife, and his fears for the safety of her expected infant, were the only reasons that made him appear reticent or cold. Yes, she had no doubt in her own mind that, when all the mournful influences of the occasion were somewhat weakened, and the baronet realized the discomforts of his widowed existence, he would renew, on a firmer basis, the courtship that had been so rudely interrupted.

Sir Alan paid several visits daily to the chamber which held his wife's remains, and in doing so he had to pass through the corridor outside Cora Murray's room, that very corridor where he had first kissed her, and told her that he loved her. The spot did not hold very pleasant memories for him, especially at this period, and they were not made better by the fact that, on more than one occasion, as he was bent on his melancholy duty, he was met by the young lady herself, wandering about in an aimless manner, and apparently wrapped in a mournful reverie. He had hurried past her as quickly as he could. He was ashamed of his blistered face and

swollen eyes, still more of the familiarities that had passed between them in that very place. His curt "Good-morning, Miss Murray," or "Good-evening, Miss Murray," had no more feeling in it than the salutation he extended to the nurse, but Cora chose to believe it had. Once she approached him silently with a beautiful wreath of white flowers and ferns which she had gathered from the hot-houses, and woven herself, and placed it in his hand. Her dark eyes fixed themselves plaintively on his face as she did so, as though she would have said, "Do not forget that I love you."

But Sir Alan's eyes never travelled higher than the wreath of flowers. He knew that she intended him to lay it on his dead wife's coffin, and with a murmured "Thank you," he passed on and disappeared. Cora Murray bit her lips with vexation, but she was not to be baulked of her prey in that fashion. She watched until she heard him traverse the corridor one afternoon in the dusk of the March gloaming, and waited for him on his return. It was so dark that he stumbled up against her, and apologized for his awkward deed. But she caught his hand within her own.

"Sir Alan," she whispered, "do you not know that I am grieving with you? Each sigh you heave finds its echo in my heart."

He raised his bloodshot eyes then for a moment and regarded her. But there was no gleam of sympathy in them in return for hers. "Thank you," he said, quietly, "you are very kind, but no one can help me. My burden is one that I must bear alone."

And with that he almost wrenched his fingers from her grasp, and went swiftly down the corridor to his own room.

"It is too soon," said Cora to herself; "all the ghastly paraphernalia of death is round him still, and the man's mind is unhinged. I daresay he is even morbid enough to regard our little flirtation as a crime for which Heaven has revenged itself by taking away his poor, useless wife. But he will get over that idea very soon, and be able to rejoice in his liberty. Meanwhile, I must keep quiet, and make no more attempts to sympathize with him. He is not ready for it. I think it will be actually more politic for me to take the initiative, and leave Glebe Royal as soon as ever the funeral is over. Yes, that is it. I will write him a melancholy letter to say that I am no use to anyone now *she* is gone, and that I had better leave on Thursday."

Accordingly, when the long, sad procession that had accompanied Lady Chichester to the grave had turned out of the gates of Glebe Royal, and she had watched the forlorn widower, half dazed with grief, get into his carriage, accompanied by his friends, and drive after it, Cora Murray sat down to her desk and indited him the following epistle:

"MY DEAR SIR ALAN,—Now that my beloved friend and patron has left us, I feel that I have no further claim upon the goodness you have uniformly extended to me, and that the sooner I leave you the better. My work is over. If I succeeded (in ever so small a degree) in pleasing her and you by the way in which I performed it, I am more than satisfied. But unfortunately, it behoves me to get another situation as soon as I can. May I leave

Glebe Royal on Thursday? You know I can have no possible wish to hurry my departure, but I am an orphan—my only guardian on the other side of the Atlantic—and I must seek a home (alas! what home can I ever find that will compare with *this*) without delay. And may I hope that when you think of the dear angel who has left us, you may sometimes also remember (and not unkindly) the poor companion who tried to make her last days happy and easy to her. May God bless you and your dear baby, and may he live to console you for your loss.

Believe me, dear Sir Alan,

“Yours truly,

“CORA MURRAY.”

When Miss Murray read over this letter, she thought it sounded very well, and could not be improved. So she folded and addressed it, and sent it down to Sir Alan's study to await his return. She quite believed that he would answer it by a request that she would postpone her departure till he had time to speak to her concerning her prospects, and she would not have been in the least surprised if she had received a summons to his study to discuss them then and there. But the mourners returned from the funeral, and the evening wore on, and no news reached her from the baronet. Cora had no confidants at this period, nor even associates. Miss Chichester and Jane Wood, who had always agreed in regarding her as an unholy thing, had hardly spoken to her since the day of Lady Chichester's death. The old servant seemed to have disappeared altogether since the advent of the nurses, and Miss Chichester continually hovered about her brother. Mrs. Markham was still in bed, and a very

fractious patient into the bargain, and the under-housemaid, who was appointed to look after Miss Murray's rooms and meals in the existing disorganization of the household, was a new servant, who seemed to know nothing of what was going on downstairs. Cora heard a good deal of commotion and noise in the household on the evening of the funeral, but to all her inquiries on the subject the girl could only tell her that some of Sir Alan's friends were going to stay at Glebe Royal for the night, and the confusion was caused by their luggage going upstairs. Such a very natural solution that Cora did not trouble herself to ask any more questions about it. She sat up so late that evening in anticipation of the baronet's reply to her letter that she was very weary when she went to bed, and slept soundly on the following morning. Lucy, the under-housemaid, brought her breakfast on a tray to her bedside, with a mouth open with astonishment.

"Lor, Miss, and you've slept through it all. Well, I never! I thought they made enough noise to wake the dead. Do you know that it's past eleven o'clock?"

"Who made a noise? What are you talking about?" said Cora, sitting up and yawning.

"Why, Miss Chichester and Sir Alan, Miss. They've gone off with the baby and nurses and old Mrs. Wood to the station. They was packing the boxes and getting ready all yesterday evening, though I never knew it till off they goes at nine o'clock."

"But where have they gone?" exclaimed Cora, now thoroughly roused and awake.

"I can't tell you, Miss, but I heard Mr. Stevens, the butler, say it was to some foreign place, and they're not coming back again neither, and the worst of it is, all the under-servants are to be dismissed with a month's wages."

Miss Murray sprang out of bed.

"*Impossible!*" she cried, "you must be mistaken. A place like Glebe Royal cannot be kept without a proper staff of servants. And who is going to pay all your wages, pray?"

"O, there's a gentleman staying here still, one of the master's friends, and we're all ordered to go to him in the study this afternoon to sign for our wages, Miss."

"It is incredible," said Cora. "I never heard of such a thing. Go down and ask Mr. Stevens if Sir Alan left any letter for me. He never would have quitted Glebe Royal without an explanation of some sort."

Lucy trotted downstairs with the message, and was back in two minutes with the answer.

"Mr. Stevens says, please Miss, will you speak to the gentleman in the study about it, and he will give you all the information you want on the subject."

Cora dressed herself with unwonted activity after this. She would not stay to take her breakfast, but, having finished her toilet, ran down to the study and knocked excitedly at the door. Her heart was burning to know the reason that no intelligence had reached her of this sudden exodus from Glebe Royal. As soon as she received permission to enter, she burst into the study, but she was quite unprepared

for the sight that met her there. Dressed in deep mourning, and seated at a writing-table, surrounded by loose papers and account books, was her old friend and admirer, Henry Fauntleroy.

For the first moment, Cora Murray was so taken aback that she entirely forgot the errand on which she had come.

"You here!" she exclaimed. "Why, I didn't know you were in England. When did you return from Gibraltar?"

"I landed last week," he answered quietly, and in her amazement she did not observe that he did not offer her his hand, "but I did not reach Glebe Royal till yesterday. Will you not be seated, Miss Murray? Sir Alan Chichester has delegated to me the duty of settling all claims upon him."

This remark recalled to her the reason for which she was there.

"But where has Sir Alan gone?" she inquired, "and why was I not informed of his intention to leave Glebe Royal? I consider that his departure without any warning is most insulting to me; more than that, it is cruel."

"I don't think Sir Alan meant to be either insulting or cruel, Miss Murray," replied Captain Fauntleroy in measured tones. "He has suffered a terrible loss, the greatest bereavement that can befall a man, and his nerves are totally unstrung by the shock. The doctors recommended an immediate change; and so he determined to shut up Glebe Royal for some time and live abroad. Under the circumstances, it is very natural. But he has deputed me to deal most

liberally with all claims upon him. He wishes you to receive, not only your full salary, but a cheque for a hundred pounds, which he desires you will accept as a present from him."

"I refuse to take it," she exclaimed passionately. "Sir Alan owes me a great deal more than he can ever pay by money, and I will have justice from him if nothing else."

"He also left this letter for you in my charge. Perhaps it will explain what you desire to know," said Fauntleroy, handing her a sealed envelope.

Cora tore it open in a fury, read the few lines it contained, and then, throwing it on the ground, stamped upon it vehemently.

"And it is for a man like *this* that I have cursed myself!" she exclaimed, with clenched hands and teeth. "O, I hate him! *I hate him!*"

"How have you cursed yourself?" demanded Captain Fauntleroy quickly. The question made her aware of the danger she had run.

"Did I say so?" she asked, with a sickly smile. "O, I was raving. The ingratitude of one's friends is so hard to bear, it makes one's senses reel. You say Sir Alan left a cheque for me. Where is it?"

"I thought you declined to accept the favor, Miss Murray."

"O Fauntleroy, don't be so hard on me," she exclaimed, going on another tack, and bursting into tears. "What on earth am I to do? Think of my position. An unfortunate girl, without home, or money or friends, forced to become a dependant in order to earn my own living, how can I

afford to refuse the help extended to me? And it has been hardly earned too. I have toiled day and night in the service of these Chichester. I was her ladyship's best friend. She has often said so. She——”

“*Stop,*” cried Henry Fauntleroy in a voice of authority. “Stop, and do not presume to take *her* name upon your lips.”

“What do you mean?” said Cora, with a face that had suddenly grown the color of ashes.

“I mean *this*, that you should never have come to Glebe Royal, that you were not fit to fasten Alice’s shoestring, and you know that I am right. I was afraid of it when I first heard that you were here, but your refutations, and my own weakness, made me credit for a while that you spoke the truth. When I was able to argue the matter more calmly with myself, I resolved to be convinced of it, once and for ever, and I advertised for Paul Rodney.”

“Coward!” she exclaimed, loudly, “and you said you *loved* me!”

“God forgive me for it,” he answered; “I said what I believed, Lotta, but I know now that love is too pure a term to apply to any feeling that a man may have for *you*. That advertisement brought me into communication again with Rodney, and he sent me a packet of your letters to Masham. Now, do you understand what I mean?”

“Give me my money and let me go,” she said with white lips. “There’s not a man amongst you all that is worth a second thought from me. I wish I had never seen your face, nor that of your friend, and

when I pass out of these doors you may take your oath I shall never enter them again."

"I sincerely trust you never will," replied Captain Fauntleroy gravely, "for your absence is the only price of my silence. Please to understand that. God forgive you, Lotta, if you have added to the load on your conscience by your residence at Glebe Royal, for He knows it was heavy enough before." He handed her the money due to her and the liberal cheque which Sir Alan had left behind, as he spoke, and watched her sign a receipt with fingers that almost trembled too violently to trace the letters of her name. But having accomplished it, Cora Murray threw the pen down, as though it had been a gauntlet to defy him to injure her further, and with a look that, if eyes could slay, would have killed him on the spot, she dashed out of the room.

"Poor Lotta," thought Fauntleroy compassionately, as he gazed after her, "she is a moral suicide. She has destroyed her own life as effectually as though she had drawn a knife across her throat. But she is too dangerous for all that. Under present circumstances I would never have trusted her to continue her acquaintance with Alan."

At that moment he observed the baronet's letter lying on the floor, where Cora had stamped upon and left it.

"I wonder what he can have said to put her in such a rage," he thought, as he stooped mechanically and picked it up, and smoothed it out and read it:

"CORA,—I cannot answer your letter, nor can I see you. My conscience is too full of remorse, and the very words that have passed between us doubles the agony of my loss.

I beg of you to forget them, or to remember them only as the ravings of an unholy dream, for they will never be renewed. I wish you well in life, but I will not meet you again. My friend Captain Fauntleroy will tell you all the rest.

"A. C."

Henry Fauntleroy turned the brief scrawl over and over in his hands, before he fully understood it.

"Is it *possible?*" he said at last. "Poor Alan too, and just as this terrible calamity was hanging over his head. No wonder he feels crushed to the very earth under the remembrance of his infidelity. But dear Alice never knew of it, that is one comfort, and if she knows of it now, she is better able to make allowances for human weakness, and to gauge the depth of the repentance that succeeds it. Well, we have both been scorched, and we have both escaped the flame. Thank Heaven for it. Please God, I may live to see the day when Alan's happiness shall be renewed, when the smiles of his child, and perhaps the love of some good woman, may bring the sunshine into his life once more; but whether his future be solitary or otherwise, I shall never cease to be grateful that he has had the moral strength to put away from him the serpent charms of Cora Murray."

THE END.

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